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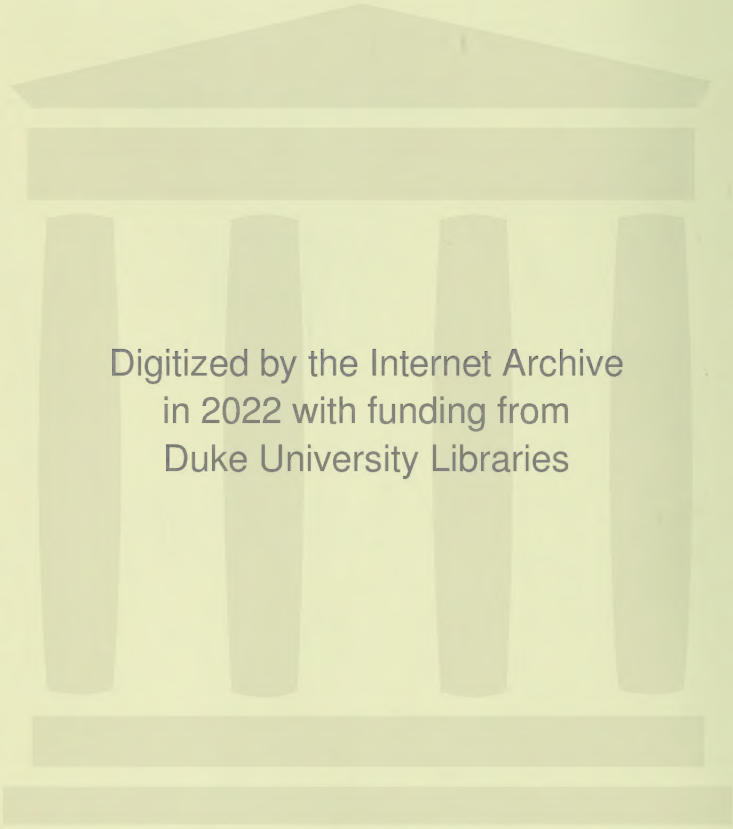
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MUNSHI PREMCHAND OF LAMHI VILLAGE

Number 3 in the publication series of
THE PROGRAM IN COMPARATIVE STUDIES
ON SOUTHERN ASIA

MUNSHI PREMCHAND OF LAMHI VILLAGE

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1969
DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Durham, N. C.

291.433
S774YZS

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L.C.C. card no. 77–80813

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF
AMERICA BY HERITAGE PRINTERS, INC.

PREFACE

Thirty-two years have passed since the death of Premchand. The recent appearance in English translation of a few of his short stories and his novel *Godan* may convey the impression that his work is still the most representative and worthy of translation among Hindi writers. On the contrary, it might more properly be considered that the present stress on Premchand in the United States is due largely to the fact that American criticism of Hindi literature is thirty-two or more years behind the times.

Two generations of novelists have produced notable novels and short stories in Hindi since Premchand's death, and names such as Agyeya, Ashk, Bhagwaticharan Varma, Ilachandra Joshi, Jainendra Kumar, Yashpal, and their successors to fame, Mohan Rakesh, Nirmal Varma, Rajendra Yadav, and Renu, to mention only a few, remain as yet unknown to Americans, although their work differs from that of Premchand and often surpasses it in quality.

Present-day writers and critics of Hindi literature generally look back on Premchand's work with respect for what he achieved, but there is a not uncommon feeling among them that much of the large literary legacy he willed to them, portraying life in Uttar Pradesh during the 1920's and 1930's, despite its representational realism, is often more historically valid than literarily persuasive. At the same time one also suspects that nowadays Premchand is more talked about than read.

A study of Premchand, however, is the logical point to begin the study of modern Hindi literature. He was the first to write novels and short stories that were consistently modern in the sense that their themes, their characterizations, their plots, and their settings broke away from traditional models which required fidelity to earlier formal conventions. He tried to make his writing conform to the reality he saw about him and to interpret it through his individual experience.

He saw the temporal setting as something other than an arena on which personifications of eternal verities talked and acted in a manner that suggested there were only ideals in the world and not practices. He attempted to show the particulars of characters with ordinary names, individualized enough to act according to what might be considered reasonable human behavior, characters who lived in a particular time and were motivated by personal memories or realistic events which caused them to do things with a certain personal logic and not only according to generalized precepts.

Certainly Premchand cleared the path from the past to the present in Hindi literature and permitted later writers to enter the new world with fewer obstructions. While Hindi writers today might feel that a good part of his writing may not endure for long because his words conveyed too much of a surface representation of life's activities, I believe that in his finest fiction, in some of his village stories and in others written during his final years, he too became aware that fiction might seek more than a one-to-one correspondence between words and their dictionary meanings and that it could imply more than it described.

The original periodicals in which many of Premchand's stories appeared have been lost and the dates of publication confused. Earlier critics, dependent upon the publication dates of the short story collections, have been hampered by the fact that these collections often contained stories written over a considerable span of years. The large proportion of the stories most easily available for a long time were in the eight-volume set *Mansarovar,* in which no editorial pains were taken to set the stories in their proper place and time. As a result of these difficulties it has often been made to appear that Premchand's work showed no consciously wrought development.

On the basis of such notable recent work as that done by Amrtrai, Premchand's son, in *Kalam-ka Sipahi* (*Soldier of the Pen,* 1962), and the detailed chronological listings of Surendra Anand in *Premchand: Kahanikar* (1964), I have tried in this study to note with precision the changes that took place in Premchand's writing, to describe its main technical characteristics, to suggest its rich subject variety, and to venture some evaluation.

As a general survey this study precludes an exploration in depth of many of the suggestions of his traditional Indian heritage hidden in

Premchand's work. Though Premchand himself was not a deep student of the Indian past, the past spoke through his attitudes and his instinctive choice of illustration and characterization to an extent that offers added insights into the peculiarly Indian quality and perspectives of his work. Some of this is touched on in footnotes and in the analysis and treatment of stories, but this essay does not make an elaborate textual study of individual stories, and to that extent it has left uncovered many subtleties which might have enriched it.

The major part of the research for this work was done during 1964 and 1965 when I was a Fellow of the American Institute of Indian Studies in India. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to this organization and to its chairman, Professor W. Norman Brown, which I express here.

In India I was received most graciously by Mr. Amrtrai, one of the sons of Premchand, at his residence in Allahabad, and by Mrs. Sivrani Devi, Premchand's widow, on the roof of the Saraswati Publishing House in Banaras. Mr. Amrtrai's great biography *Kalam-ka Sipahi* and his yeoman service in collecting, editing, and arranging his father's works were major factors in giving some direction to my own efforts. To him and to Sivrani Devi, whose wonderful book *Premchand Gharme* (*Premchand at Home*) made Premchand's personality come to life for me, I wish to express my thankfulness.

I will not unduly lengthen this text to add the names of a legion of people, including Bhusi, a *rikshawala* of Banaras, who helped make this book a reality. But I owe special thanks to Professors Holden Furber and Ernest Bender of the South Asia Regional Studies program at the University of Pennsylvania, to Professor Robert I. Crane of Duke and Syracuse Universities, to Mrs. Camella Wilson of the University of Pennsylvania, and to Cheryl Letitia Swan. I also wish to thank the Duke University Press for its helpfulness and efficiency, and in particular Robert Mirandon, the editor who guided this work.

NOTE

It has been felt that diacritical marks so necessary in directing the reader to pronounciations approximating those used in Hindi might be dispensed with in the present work since a large percentage of the Hindi words transcribed into English are confined to story titles which are usually translated in the text, or to bibliographical entries which will interest only a small number of readers who know Hindi and thus should encounter little difficulty.

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MUNSHI PREMCHAND OF LAMHI VILLAGE

One LAMHI AND THE EASTERN DISTRICTS

Premchand, the Hindi-Urdu novelist and short story writer, was born on July 31, 1880, in the small village of Lamhi which lies three or four miles from Banaras on the road to Azamgarh. He died fifty-six years later on October 8, 1936, in the city of Banaras where his body was borne through the streets and cremated at Manikarnika *ghat* on the banks of the Ganges River.[1]

In India there is general agreement among critics that he was the foremost writer in both Hindi and Urdu during the first three decades of the twentieth century. His literary legacy consists of a volume of writing of such wide measure,[2] diversity, and vigor, it marks such a notable change from earlier writing in these literatures, and it has so influenced writers of his and subsequent time, that literary historians regard his work as an epitome and signature of the period, and they call it the Premchand Age.

The name Premchand, however, is a pseudonym. At birth his parents called him Dhanpatrai, while an uncle nicknamed him Nawabrai. Premchand used both these names in his early works, and it was not

1. Basic biographical sources for the study of Premchand's life are Amrtrai, ed., *Premchand Smrti* (Ilahabad, n.d.); Premchand, *Kafan* (10th ed.; Ilahabad, 1961), pp. 58–69; Premchand, *Citthi Patri*, ed. Amrtrai (2 vols.; Ilahabad, 1962). For the most reliable and extensive biography, winner of a Sahitya Akademi award in 1965, see Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi* (Ilahabad, 1962). See also Sivrani Devi Premchand, *Premchand Ghar-me* (Dilli, 1956); Indar Nath Madan, *Premchand: An Interpretation* (Lahore, 1946); Hans Raj Rahbar, *Premchand: Jivan, Kala aur Kritiva* (Dilli, 1962).

2. His writings include twelve completed and one incomplete novels, approximately three hundred short stories, four dramas, eight translations of novels, plays, and stories, several biographical sketches, four collections of children's stories, and numerous editorials on a wide variety of subjects. See Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, pp. 653–56. See also Madan, *Premchand: An Interpretation*, pp. 170–71; Narendra Kohli, *Premchand-ke Sahitya Siddhant* (Dilli, 196–), pp. 147–48.

until several years later when he ran into difficulties with the government over the subject matter of some of his stories that he chose to disguise his identity with the name Premchand.[3]

The family into which he was born belonged to the Srivastava Dusra subsection of the Kayasth caste, a caste identified through the preceding centuries with occupations that required a knowledge of reading and writing. The qualification of male literacy combined with a pragmatic and socially broad-minded approach to life had been useful to the Kayasth caste by giving it access to positions of importance during both the Muslim and British periods of Indian history.[4] The caste status of Kayasths, however, has been in dispute. Certain segments of the caste have sought respectability within Hinduism by wearing the sacred thread,[5] forbidding the drinking of alcohol or the eating of meat, and have been cautious in the marriage exchanges of their daughters and sons,[6] while other segments, such as that of Premchand's personal family, ignored many of these prescriptions.[7]

Premchand's grandfather had become the *patwari*[8] of Lamhi village, and it is therefore interesting to consider the opinion of Kayasth patwaris expressed by a late nineteenth-century writer on caste. Of Kayasths, he wrote: "the caste status of a family depends usually upon the official position held by their ancestors in the service of the former rulers of the country. The descendants of Patwaris or village accountants have generally the lowest positions."[9] This author ranks patwari Kayasths as *sudras*,[10] and though biographers do not dwell on the matter of the caste status of Premchand's family other than to say

3. See below, pp. 63–64.

4. Aziz Ahmed, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford, 1964), p. 106; see also Bhakat Prasad Mazumdar, *Socio-Economic History of Northern India, 1030–1194 A.D.* (Calcutta, 1960), pp. 97–105.

5. The rite of the sacred thread was the initiation ceremony by which boys of the three upper castes entered into full status as Aryans and were permitted to study the sacred texts of Hinduism. Investiture with a three-strand thread to be worn over the right shoulder and under the left arm formed a central part of the ceremony.

6. See below, p. 17, n. 45.

7. Premchand's grandfather, for example, was given to drinking alcohol in liberal quantities. An uncle had an affair with an outcaste girl and was given a severe beating by the men of her group in the village. See Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, pp. 6 and 26; see also, Premchand, *Kafan*, pp. 51–54.

8. Village accountant, land recorder.

9. Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya, *Hindu Castes and Sects* (Calcutta, 1896), p. 187.

10. The classical division of castes in order of rank was brahman, ksatriya, vaisya, sudra.

they were Kayasths, their descriptions strongly indicate that the male members of Premchand's immediate family were not overly solicitous of their caste ranking.

Despite the differences in social position among Kayasths, however, the whole caste shared the tradition of giving their sons an education. Premchand received his earliest education under a Muslim *maulvi*,[11] an education accented by the learning of Persian and Arabic. This form of training was a legacy of Kayasth adaptability during the days of Muslim rule when the learning of these languages brought position and wealth. It does not seem farfetched, indeed, to conclude that in the setting of India's Uttar Pradesh there was something unique in being a Kayasth, and credence may be given to the proposition that Premchand's birth in that caste, in a branch not regarded as "twice-born,"[12] was significant in enabling him to rise above the social restrictions that so often marked the lot of low-caste persons tied to low expectations from life. While his caste background afforded an unusual social and religious tolerance and an intimacy with an illiterate, underprivileged world not depicted realistically in earlier Hindi literature, it also offered the traditional Kayasth expectation of escape from menial labor and the conventional "writers' caste" outlet for Premchand to become the first modern chronicler of the village. His heritage gave him the privilege of both a worm's-eye view and a bird's-eye view of this fragment of life.

During the years of Premchand's youth, however, the Kayasth caste as a whole had become stirred to organize itself over wide areas so as to institute social reforms within the caste and to present to the world a united ksatriya rather than a sudra image.[13] Premchand's second marriage in 1906, when compared with his first marriage in 1896, shows in a measure this evolution from the unpretentious village Kayasth world of his childhood to the period of Kayasth national conferences and the self-conscious awareness of caste prestige that marked the years after he had reached maturity.

Though Premchand's caste and family heritage may have helped to

11. A learned teacher or doctor of Islamic law.

12. Belonging to one of the three upper caste divisions—brahman, ksatriya, or vaisya.

13. Charles H. Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform* (Princeton, N.J., 1964), p. 281.

suggest the general direction of his future, they did not offer an exact blueprint. His father, who was very poor, worked for the postal service and was transferred frequently from one ill-paying post office to another in the district towns and capitals of eastern Uttar Pradesh. Premchand, moving with his parents, got his secondary school training in a variety of places. He intended to become a lawyer, but because of a weakness in mathematics he could not obtain scholarships to enter college. It was not until he was thirty-nine years of age that he was finally able to get his B.A. degree privately, but his adequacy in other subjects had qualified him to become a non-mathematics teacher, and it was as a schoolteacher, for most of the time in government schools, that he made his living until 1921 when, under the spell of Gandhi, he resigned his position.[14]

When he was fifteen years old, Premchand's first marriage took place to the daughter of a small landowner from a village near Basti in eastern Uttar Pradesh. He had looked forward to this marriage with a great deal of pleasure and had himself cut the bamboos for the marriage pavilion. According to custom Premchand went to the girl's village where the wedding was performed without his getting a preview of the bride's face. What followed, he described many years later:

> Finally the time came for my wife's departure from her home. . . . We had to go by camel cart. When we alighted from the camel cart, my wife caught hold of my hand and began to walk ahead. I wasn't prepared for this. I felt very embarrassed. When I finally saw her face my blood ran dry.[15]

And Amrtrai, Premchand's son and biographer, goes into greater detail:

> Her appearance was unpleasing—coarse, fat, slatternly. Not only this, on her face were deep scars of smallpox and one leg was shorter than the other so that the unfortunate girl moved in a jerky manner.[16]

14. The biographical facts here summarized are taken from the following works previously cited: Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*; Sivrani Devi Premchand, *Premchand Ghar-me*; and Premchand, *Kafan*.

15. Sivrani Devi Premchand, p. 7. These are actually the words and style of Sivrani Devi, Premchand's wife, as she re-created Premchand's words from memory.

16. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 34.

"When my marriage party arrived," Premchand told his second wife years later, "my father discovered that the bride was very ugly. The shamelessness of her behavior he had seen outside. My father's second wife's father had arranged this marriage. He now said to his wife: 'What a tragedy! My beautiful son and this . . . this woman! I will get him married to someone else.' "[17]

This first wife stayed at Lamhi with Premchand's stepmother for some time (his father had died not long after the wedding), but the two women fought constantly. Premchand apparently had no connection with her and when he began his working life in 1899, he went away without taking her along. The girl went back to her village and remained there most of the time, living on for many years. Premchand ignored her existence and when several years later he married for the second time, it was without benefit of any formal or legal divorce, nor did he tell his second wife about the first. She found out about it inadvertently eight or nine years later and when she taxed him with his deceit, he replied: "When a person believes someone to be alive, that person is alive; when he thinks someone dead, that person is dead."[18]

Premchand started his writing career with novels. His first serious work was done while he was a government schoolteacher stationed at Partabgarh and at the Allahabad Training College from 1900 to 1905. It was in 1905 that Premchand's career may be said to have found its true literary focus. In that year he was appointed to the Zilla School in Kanpur, where he made close personal and literary relationships with many of the leading Urdu writers of the period and began a lasting friendship with Dayanarain Nigam, editor of the prestigious Urdu journal *Zamana*. *Zamana* had been started in 1903 in Bareilly, but since November of that year it had been under the editorship of Nigam at Kanpur.

Zamana built up a reputation, particularly after Daya Narain Nigam took over its editorship. . . . *Zamana's* contributors included Hindus and Muslims in equal number—from all over India. . . . Among its contributors were some from the older generation who

17. Sivrani Devi Premchand, pp. 8–9. 18. *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26.

had almost given up writing nearly twenty years earlier. They were persuaded by *Zamana*'s young editor to come back to the literary field. . . . Lala Lajpat Rai was a regular contributor. *Zamana*'s policy . . . naturally subscribed to such views as were accepted by the educated youth of the Hindu community, e.g., advisability of widow remarriage and foreign travels, education of women, etc. It had a liberal outlook which could at times be taken as going against the Hindu traditions.[19]

During this Kanpur period Premchand's second Urdu novel, later called *Prema* in its Hindi edition, was published, as was his first collection of short stories, *Soz-e-Vatan* (1908). The first edition of each book was of a thousand copies. If all the copies of *Soz-e-Vatan*, priced at five annas a copy, had been sold, the book would have earned approximately a hundred dollars before costs. The author's percentage must have early discouraged Premchand from trying to make a living from writing alone.[20]

In the novel *Prema*, Premchand depicted the evils that had arisen because of the prohibition of widow remarriage by Hindu society. The hero of the story, impressed by the lecture of an Arya Samaj preacher determined "to devote his life to bring about a reform in the Hindu society," builds a home for widows and marries a widow. "The marriage, against which there is stiff opposition from all conservative sections of society, takes place only under very heavy police and military protection. . . ."[21] The subject matter of the stories in *Soz-e-Vatan* was of patriotism. Indeed, these two early works, *Prema* and *Soz-e-Vatan*, contain in seed form the major themes of his future writing. Their subject matter of political independence and social reform were subjects that in the India of the first decade of the twentieth century had moved from private provincial conversations to the national forums of the Indian National Congress and the National Social Conference, the two organizations which met at the same site, one following the other, for their annual conferences.

19. Madan Gopal, *Munshi Premchand: A Literary Biography* (Bombay, 1964), p. 42.

20. Premchand's first novel, *Asrar-e-Maabid*, was published serially in the Banaras Urdu weekly *Avaz-e-Khalk* from October 8, 1903, to February 1, 1905. See Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 52. For the details on *Soz-e-Vatan*, see Rahbar, p. 47; see also Gopal, p. 68.

21. Gopal, pp. 36–38.

Premchand's political views at this time appear to have favored the position of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who led the more militant faction in the Congress and demanded self-rule at the earliest possible time. Tilak's belief, however, that social reform should be subordinated to the prior claims of political sovereignty and left for solution to an independent people[22] are not those of Premchand. As has been seen, even in the early novel *Prema* he denounced the injustices placed upon women who were widows. His concern, rather, was that social reform should be inspired if possible by teachings, unheeded perhaps, explicit in India's own past. In these early works he shows his uneasiness over Western ways.[23] He sees the disappearance of simple village life and the emergence of a world filled with factories and government offices and police; he sees women in high heels, wearing eyeglasses and lipstick, conversing boldly with men, getting divorces—such women taking the place of the Indian woman who remains faithful, loyal, virtuous, and retiring.

The development of Premchand from a boy who during his school days read voraciously all the stories of magic, mystery, and unreal romance he could find to the young writer who chose to write about widows' problems, nationalism, and the village clearly reflects the temper of those times and his intense involvement. One had only to be alive and literate to encounter these problems. They were the principal topics of conversation and reading. Hindi literature itself, from the time of Bharatendu Hariscandra (1850–85), had been strongly infiltrated by ideas of reform. Of Hariscandra, Kailas Prakas writes: "Bharatendu Hariscandra and Radhacaran Goswami were followers of the traditional religion [*sanatan dharm*], but under the influence of Dayananda Saraswati they adopted all the reforms."[24]

Another factor affecting Premchand's choice of subject matter was his intimate connection with the journal *Zamana*, which, as has been observed, concerned itself actively with social reform. Finally, the influence of the Arya Samaj appears to have attracted Premchand.

22. O. P. Goyal, *Studies in Modern Indian Political Thought* (Allahabad, 1964), pp. 56–57.

23. Premchand, "Yahi Meri Matrabhumi Hai," *Mansarovar* (8 vols.; Ilahabad, 1962), VI, 5–11.

24. Kailas Prakas, *Premchand-purva Hindi Upanyas* (Dilli, 1961), p. 121.

This large movement, given impulse by Dayananda Saraswati, was based upon the assumption that the Vedas could offer sacred sanction to the most unorthodox-seeming reforms. Using traditional texts to effect important reforms, the Arya Samaj gave many Indians an outlet for advocating change without being considered pro-British or anti-national. No evidence that Premchand was a dues-paying member is available until 1913 when he asked Nigam to pay his dues for him to the Hamirpur branch of the movement,[25] but such circumstantial evidence as the Arya Samaj preacher in the novel *Prema*, who induced the hero of the story to go out and marry a widow, makes it clear that Premchand himself was impressed by the reform group's activities.

In 1893 the Arya Samaj is said to have had 40,000 members; in 1901 there were 92,000; by 1921 there were more than one million.[26] By 1901 nearly three-quarters of the members of Arya Samaj were located in the United Provinces (present Uttar Pradesh).[27] By the time of Premchand's residence in Partabgarh, 1900–1903 and 1904–5, his biographer says:

> At this time there was a great deal of movement among the Arya Samajists. Preachers traveled about. At place after place there were meetings, gatherings, debates with orthodox pandits. The evils of child marriage were exposed, the wrongs of ill-matched marriages were shown, and arguments assembled from the shastras approving the marriage of widows.[28]

There were other problems discussed, but the questions regarding marriage customs appear to have been very prominent in the proceedings. It is not remarkable, therefore, that this should form the subject matter of his early novel and continue to be a major theme to the end of his life.

In Premchand's personal life these preoccupations can be perceived in the nature of his second marriage. When in 1905 he came to Kanpur, he made up his mind to marry again. The idea of divorce from his first wife does not seem to have occurred to him. In the meantime,

25. Premchand, *Citthi Patri*, I, 17.
26. Heimsath, pp. 294, 302.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 303.
28. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 46. See also John Campbell Oman, *Indian Life: Religious and Social* (London, 1889), p. 99.

having written about widow remarriage, undoubtedly aware of the increasing number of such marriages under the auspices of the Arya Samaj, and perhaps emboldened by the fact that he was away from his home village where his relatives and caste fellows disapproved of marriage to widows,[29] Premchand decided to marry a widow and did so in 1906.[30]

One day by chance he was reading a newspaper, possibly the Arya Samaj *Sankarlal Srotriya* of Bareilly,[31] when he saw an advertisement saying that a Munshi Deviprasad of Salempur Village, Post Office Kanwar, District Fatehpur, wanted to marry off his child-widow daughter, and whoever was interested could get in touch with him. Premchand immediately wrote, and in reply he got both a letter and a pamphlet of twenty-five or thirty pages. The pamphlet's author was given as "A preserver of Kayasth child widows."

The author, who was Premchand's future father-in-law, had been a very orthodox gentleman who had married off his two daughters when they were ten or eleven years old. Unfortunately, the younger daughter's husband died before she ever saw him, and the parents could not bear to see her spend a loveless life. After long discussion the parents decided they would risk censure and try to remarry their daughter. This was no light matter, and the Munshi determined to prepare the ground by writing and distributing a pamphlet in Urdu and Hindi and sending it out to his caste fellows far and wide. Using arguments from the old scriptures, and beginning most paragraphs with "O my dear caste-fellows of the Chitragupta Vansiya Kayasths,"[32] he made a strong denunciation of people who go to the great caste conferences and meetings in the cities, make pious statements based on scripture about improving the habits and customs of the caste, "and neither the ones who give the speeches nor those who listen are affected in the least."[33] He pleaded with them for justice to girls who are married and never see

29. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 74. The present writer questioned several Kayasths in Premchand's village in 1965 as to how many Kayasth widows had been remarried in Lamhi village since 1906. They all answered, "None."

30. *Ibid.*, p. 79. Madan Gopal says the year was 1909.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

32. Long quotations from this pamphlet are contained in *ibid.*, pp. 76–78. Chitragupta is the mythical ancestor of thirteen subsections of the Kayasths.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

their husbands and those who had no chance to bear children before their husbands' deaths. He describes the miseries that can come to them. In conclusion he musters arguments for widow remarriage based on the authority of the Rigveda, Yajurveda, and many far more obscure sacred texts.

This pamphlet from a Kayasth in a small village to his caste-fellows outside affords a glimpse of the increased scope of the caste's influence during these years of social turmoil. The fact that a man of such orthodox views, who earlier married his daughters at the ages of ten or eleven, should assess the new mood of the country as one in which a pamphlet advocating widow remarriage had the possibility of receiving favorable attention also suggests the wide acceptance in North India of the methods initiated by Dayananda Saraswati of the Arya Samaj.

Premchand's second marriage took place at a time when the country, in addition to social reform, was going through intense political activity, acerbated by the split in the Congress between the Nationalists, or Extremists, under Tilak, and the Moderates under Feroze Shah Mehta and Gokhale. It followed immediately the period of Curzon's partition of Bengal and included a time of assassinations and bombings in Bengal and Maharashtra. There was a severe suppression of the press which, according to one authority, resulted between 1910 and 1919 in government seizure of 350 presses, three hundred newspapers, and editions of more than five hundred books.[34] One of these books was Premchand's first collection of short stories, *Soz-e-Vatan*, already mentioned. That it was then considered subversive indicates the alarm and consternation with which the government of India in those years confronted the spirit of agitation within the country. Today its contents appear innocuous.[35]

The book *Soz-e-Vatan* was published in Kanpur, but its confiscation by the government did not take place until after Premchand's transfer from Kanpur to Hamirpur, a southeastern district of Uttar Pradesh lying contiguous to the province of Madhya Pradesh (the British Central Provinces). In Hamirpur District and its capital, Mahoba, where he maintained his headquarters, Premchand began a period of his career away from the major cultural centers of the province. As

34. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

35. See below, pp. 63–65.

Amrtrai describes it: "Now he didn't know what would happen, what the conditions would be. Mahoba was a jungle. It was in a section of the Bundelkhand hills. He would long for the sight of an educated person."[36]

However, he received a promotion to subdeputy inspector of schools and his salary went up from Rs. 30 to Rs. 50 per month. At that time the province had forty-seven deputy inspectors and eighty-one subdeputy inspectors.[37] The subdeputy inspector, though not high in the official scale, became a man of some importance in the country areas where he inspected schools. Wherever he went, people came bearing trays of foodstuffs—and even money. A subdeputy inspector had the power to write unfavorable reports, and this was enough to give him certain status as he moved about his district taking a tent, an orderly, and a cook along with him. Premchand refused all offers of money, but the system was too strong for him to refuse the foodstuffs. These he finally allowed to be given to his servants.

> Usually he had to go by horse or bullock cart. And when that thirty-year-old, fair-skinned, broad and sturdy young man came along—strong-armed, broad-chested, having large spreading mustaches—a turban wound about his head, it seemed as if some prince or some high police officer was arriving. Reaching the village where the inspection was to be held his tent was set up in some field or mango grove depending on the weather, and the news spread rapidly through the village that some inspector [nispittar] sahab had come.[38]

Premchand lived in Hamirpur District from 1909 to 1914. From there he was transferred to the northeastern Basti District, noted as being one of the most backward areas in India.[39] In 1916 he went to Gorakhpur, another eastern district of Uttar Pradesh generally considered backward, where he remained until he resigned from govern-

36. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 106.

37. H. R. Nevill, *Benares: A Gazetteer, being Volume XXVI of the District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh* (Lucknow, 1922), p. 248.

38. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 108.

39. For a description of Basti at a later period, see National Council of Applied Economic Research, New Delhi, *Rehabilitation and Development of Basti District: A Case Study in the Economics of Depressed Areas* (New York, 1959), pp. 12–15.

ment service in 1921. Despite the backwardness of the area and his remoteness from the principal centers of culture, the years Premchand spent as a subdeputy inspector of schools are important in his development as a writer and as a man. The main biographical facts are known, but information as to the influences that came to bear upon his intellectual life is slight and fragmentary. Premchand was twenty-nine years old when he began this period and forty-one when it came to an end. When it started he wrote only in Urdu, and when it ended he had become a famous Hindi novelist and short story writer as well.

An examination of the eastern districts only a few years prior to 1909 reveals certain interesting facts that may help to explain aspects of his development while residing there. The area was predominantly rural. In 1901 Hamirpur district had seven towns and 756 villages, Basti had four towns and 6,903 villages, Gorakhpur with a much larger population had eighteen towns and 7,544 villages. In Basti 84 per cent of the population was Hindu, and in Gorakhpur Hindus numbered 87.2 per cent. Literacy in these districts stood at 2.82 per cent (Basti), 2.8 per cent (Gorakhpur), and 3.1 per cent (Hamirpur) of the population, with males reaching a 5.5 to 6.5 per cent level. The Muslim minority in these areas had an even lower literacy level than the Hindus. Basti's hospitals and dispensaries could take care of fifty-one in-patients at one time; the others proportionately were similar. The caste structure of this area, showing a predominance of low-caste persons, nevertheless reveals that brahmans and Rajputs[40] held from two-thirds (Basti) to one-half (Gorakhpur) of the land in their private possession.[41]

These statistics, even if not perfectly accurate, cannot help but picture an area of deprivation and backwardness. They reveal a social and economic structure that placed a minority of brahmans and Rajputs and banias[42] above, and a wide variety of lower castes below. These figures are reflected in Premchand's numerous stories of village life, filled with lowly cultivators preyed upon by landlords, moneylenders, brahmans, and the low-level government officials which the

40. Members of a dominant military caste of ksatriya rank.

41. *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (Oxford, 1908), VIII, 126–32, XII, 334–40, XIII, 13–22.

42. A merchant caste whose ventures in shopkeeping and moneylending have given them a name for greed and ruthlessnss.

bureaucracy used for collecting its land rents. Premchand himself was born in a village, but it was more than likely that his passion at the injustice done to the villager received its first impetus as he wandered through these miserable districts as subdeputy inspector of district schools.

In the first years in Hamirpur District, his route lay in the jungly, rocky areas about Mahoba town, over which were scattered the relics of the Bundelkhand Rajputs who had ruled this area for some centuries. They had fought the Muslims, but they had also fought each other, and here Premchand heard legends which resulted in a long string of stories about these Bundelas and the manner in which their immense pride led them to give up their lives for frequently petty reasons but with endless bravery. This was a period shortly after the confiscation and burning of his book of stories *Soz-e-Vatan* when in order to continue writing he had had to change his name from Dhanpat Rai (and Nawab Rai) to the pseudonym Premchand. The effects of what he saw in the villages did not appear immediately in his stories, but the disguised feelings of a patriot were there, describing Rajput times that showed Hindu warriors fighting endlessly for their honor.

The dominant strands of his literary work—national independence, the Indian heritage, internal social reform, and the life of the village—found source material in the eastern districts. The desire for independence, now masked in historical subject matter, emerged later under the influence of Gandhi's non-co-operation movements into open, pointed, and specific censure of the British. In these early years evidence points to the fact that politically he favored the views of Tilak over those of Gokhale, the Extremists over the Moderates, and it is therefore noteworthy that his patriotism had need to conceal itself in the non-controversial past. The confiscation of his own book, the records in the newspapers of other confiscations of books and presses in those days, the fact that he was himself a government servant earning his living as an official, that his family responsibilities were gradually increasing, that he could not make a living by writing alone, all these are reason enough for the devious means used to spread his nationalistic message.

The subject of social reform, however, was not proscribed. Even the British agreed that it was unseemly for girls of eight or nine to be mar-

ried to men of fifty or sixty. But the battle to right the numerous social wrongs that had crept into the Hindu way of life was not a battle in which all Indians agreed. There were those who fought to preserve the old customs unchanged. Others who agreed on the necessity of change were divided on the strategy to be employed. A long battle had been fought between those who, believing that India's social awakening was caused by its contacts with the West, sought reform on Western models, and those who believed that what was needed was "a regeneration of purified Hindu society based on a spiritual revival" of things that already lay in their tradition, though lately covered over with "the refuse of degraded customs and untruths."[43]

By the end of the nineteenth century, as the demands for political advancement began to cause a split between those who would cooperate with the British hoping for encouragement, and those who wanted Independence on a definite date, the tide of popular feeling seemed to move with the latter.[44] Though their leader Tilak's view seemed to be that India should get freedom first, and then she herself could look to her own social regeneration, this did not override the feeling that social reforms must be made. Undoubtedly, however, Tilak's influence strengthened the hands of those who wanted social reform to be Indian and not a copy of Western models. Patriotism could be kept alive this way during times when things were politically quiet.

Premchand by 1909 was in the heart of an orthodox countryside, officially ruled over by England, but, after taxes, controlled by brahmans, Rajputs, and banias. Judging from his stories, the dominant image he had of brahmans and banias was that they had been untouched by ideas of social reform, whether Indian or Western, revivalist or secular. They had a strong vested interest in seeing that what happened yesterday should happen precisely in the same way tomorrow. It was inevitable that Premchand with his background of unortho-

43. Heimsath, p. 25.

44. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote that after the split in the Indian Nationalist Congress in 1907 between the Extremists under Tilak and the Moderates under Gokhale, "The moderates continued to control the Congress, the extremists were driven out. The moderates won, but it was at the cost of their popularity in the country, for Tilak's party was far more popular with the people" (*Glimpses of World History* [New York, 1942], p. 442).

doxy, a man who himself had bravely married a widow,[45] should oppose these "no-changers." It was also inevitable that one who was passionately for Independence and who had had a book of short stories confiscated and burned by the government should be opposed to reform on Western models and should seek ways of reform that would make him feel both Indian and patriotic.

It is not surprising, therefore, that his views during this period should be strongly influenced by the Arya Samaj and by the teachings of Vivekananda. Dayananda Saraswati (1824–83) and Vivekananda (1863–1902) were men of a different stamp from Premchand. They were men of religion, while he was never a serious believer. In a long letter to I. N. Madan in 1934 he wrote:

> Formerly I believed in a supreme deity, not as a result of thinking, but simply as a traditional belief. That belief is being shattered. Of course there is some hand behind [the] universe, but I don't think it has anything to do with human affairs, just as it has nothing to do with the affairs of ants or flies or mosquitoes.[46]

Saraswati and Vivekananda appear as saints or seers, authentic to Indian tradition, men who had fasted and meditated and wandered far and wide, seeking by renunciation of all earthly things to know God. Premchand had not felt these impulses.

It is of significance to the Premchand story, however, that these men, rooted in Indian Hindu tradition, should have emerged from their long spiritual struggles to make the choice for the uplift of society their main tenet, rather than to choose the solitary, traditional path of individual self-realization.[47]

"I have now travelled all over India . . . ," said Vivekananda, "but

45. That it still required bravery in 1920 is shown from a news item in *The Leader* of Allahabad for June 2, 1920, which describes the marriage between a Kayasth of the Srivastava Dusra subsection and a Kayasth girl of the Asthana subsection. The article stated that this marriage was a landmark in the annals of social reform. Both families were enlightened. One of the uncles of the bridegroom was a barrister, two uncles of the bride were "England-returned" and were in the service of Gwalior State, and a third uncle was a captain in the Indian Medical Service. The article also stated the belief that this was the first instance of inter-caste marriage among the Kayasths in this part of the country.

46. Madan, *Premchand: An Interpretation*, p. 166.

47. This is true also of Gandhi, who later claimed Premchand's allegiance. See Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Calcutta, 1945), p. 383.

> alas, it was agony to me, my brothers, to see with my own eyes the terrible poverty and misery of the masses, and I could not restrain my tears! It was now my firm conviction that it is futile to preach religion amongst them without first trying to remove their poverty and their sufferings."[48]

Of Dayananda Saraswati also, the following statement appears representative:

> Like the orthodox Hindus, ultimate salvation he accepted as the objective towards which all men must strive. But he refused to confine and cabin these strivings to individual and personal ends alone. He declared service—the physical, moral and spiritual uplift of others—not only a cardinal principle, but the motivating rule of life.[49]

It was because Saraswati and Vivekananda turned to the uplift of the poor and the illiterate that they appealed to Premchand. Furthermore, that they seemed to do it in an Indian way pleased him. The influence of the Arya Samaj and of Vivekananda is evident in Premchand's life and in the special mark of his work.

There is some strangeness, however, in seeing this Kayasth with his tolerant past, his intimacy with Muslim culture, his writing of Urdu, his excellent command of Persian, and his indifference to religion, now in these eastern districts being caught up in a movement such as the Arya Samaj, which saw itself as Hindu and despite its protestations bore some taint of communal Hindu feeling. Chapter XIV of the *Satyarth Prakash* of Dayananda Saraswati, the scripture of the Arya Samaj, examines the Koran with a harshness that could easily give offense to a Muslim.[50]

Of significance to this period also is Premchand's gradual turning from Urdu to Hindi. He offers the reason for this as the lack of development of Urdu journals,[51] and judging from the difficulties he en-

48. Quoted in Romain Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel* (5th ed.; Calcutta, 1960), pp. 30–31. See also *The Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples* (4th ed.; Calcutta, 1955), pp. 494–96.

49. Sri Ram Sharma, *The Arya Samaj and Its Impact on Contemporary India* (Una, Punjab, n.d.), p. 5.

50. Dayananda Saraswati, *Satyarth Prakash*, trans. Chiranjiva Bharadwaja (Lahore, 1927), pp. 613–76.

51. Premchand, *Citthi Patri*, I, 31.

countered in having some of his story collections published, this undoubtedly is a valid reason.[52] But it is suggestive that in this period Premchand began to evince a great interest in Hindi literature, which up to this time had been of minor interest or had been rendered into Urdu before he saw it. In February, 1913, he wrote to Nigam: "Consider me as your editor of the Hindi department. I will keep on translating suitable and interesting articles from newspapers and magazines."[53] And from his pen came many articles in *Zamana* such as: "Hindu Civilization and People's Welfare" (March, 1912), "The Ramayana and Mahabharat" (May–June, 1912), "Bharatendu Babu Harishchandra" (January, 1913), "The Poetry of Kalidas" (August, 1914), "Bihari" (April, 1917), "Keshav" (July, 1917), which show his developing interest in Hindi literature.[54] Partly his turning to Hindi was influenced by friends among writers whom he met during these years, such as Mahavir Poddar and Pandit Mannan Dwivedi "Gazpuri."[55] And while there is no known connection between this new interest in Hindi and his contacts with the Arya Samaj, the Arya Samaj had adopted Hindi as its major language of propaganda and had done a great deal through journals and newspapers and schools to inspire the spread of the language.[56] This spread was not always accomplished without some marks of rivalry with Urdu, and without some implication that Hindi was primarily for Hindus.

Premchand himself did not desert Urdu completely. To the time of his death he continued to write occasionally in Urdu and had those works which were written in Hindi translated into Urdu. It would be unjust therefore to claim this move toward Hindi as evidence by itself of a growing Hindu viewpoint. The attempt here is to suggest that the composite atmosphere encountered in these backward eastern districts did induce him temporarily toward a viewpoint marked

52. Amrtrai writes of Premchand's experience in getting his collection of short stories *Prem Pachisi* published in Urdu: "Following great difficulty and much begging and pleading, the first part which contained twelve stories, was made ready and printed in the beginning of 1915, after one and a half years" (*Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 180).

53. Premchand, *Citthi Patri*, I, 17.

54. Collected in Premchand, *Vividh Prasang*, ed. Amrtrai (3 vols.; Ilahabad, 1962).

55. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, pp. 151–52, 159.

56. Kailas Prakas, giving Dayananda Saraswati's teachings the major credit for the rise of the social-problem novel in Hindi, says among other things: "Because the medium was Sanskrit and Hindi, the effect was not confined to a minute group of people, but rested upon the common people" (p. 81).

by exclusive Hindu traits. Here the Hindu voice was dominant and almost alone, and the Muslim voice was muted. If one also looks to the political background of this time, it appears that the introduction of the Morley-Minto Reforms inaugurating separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims helped increase communal tensions and could have evoked the statement which Premchand made in a letter to Nigam: "Now I have no faith in a Hindustani nation and the effort toward it is useless."[57]

57. Quoted in Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 153.

Two THE NATIONAL WATCHMAN

Premchand did not submit long to a sectarian bias. Already by 1916 when he moved to Gorakhpur, new influences began to appear in his life. Later he was to disagree with the Arya Samaj policy of proselytization among Muslims.[1] He was at all times more interested in the social reform activities of this organization than in any religious aspects. He was, moreover, a literary man with contacts outside this area and could not have remained locked in a provincial world.

His writing of this time shows no anti-Muslim bias; rather it ignores the Muslims largely, and creates a world of Hindus. If there were any lingering characteristics in his work that may have been buttressed by his contact with the eastern districts where he began maturing as a writer, it may lie in the nature of the middle-class heroines whom he produced forever after. These women may of course go back much further to the type of woman his own mother had seemed to him, and further back to the old stories of the Hindu past. Here, however, where thoughts of social reform, of education of women, marriage of widows, uplifting of prostitutes, and of women devoting their hours to national and social uplift were in the air, he might have been expected to produce heroines who experimented with new standards. Premchand, however, continued in most of his fiction to keep them chained to the ideals of the storied women in the Ramayana and Mahabharata. He kept them in an orthodox Hindu frame, symbols of virtue, modesty, self-sacrifice, and humility.

1. He wrote to Nigam on April 22, 1923: "I am writing a short essay on the Malkana Suddhi. I am strongly opposed to this movement. I will send it on in three or four days. The Arya Samajists will be angry but I hope that you will give this essay a place in *Zamana*" (*Citthi Patri*, I, 132). The Malkana Suddhi was an attempt by Arya Samajists to reconvert to Hinduism a group called the Malkana Rajputs who had been converted to Islam. Suddhi means purification.

The Hinduistic influences Premchand was affected by in the seven years in Hamirpur and Basti districts seemed to lose some of their force after his arrival in Gorakhpur in 1916. He lived there until 1921, when he resigned his government position. A combination of persuasive forces may be reconstructed to explain partially the unfolding of his views from a provincial to a national compass. These may be summarized briefly. The fact that Premchand lived in Gorakhpur City, the capital, which differed in its population texture from the rest of Gorakhpur district, is merely noted in passing. In the total district the Hindus comprised 87 per cent of the population, but in Gorakhpur City their numerical superiority over Muslims was less than two to one.[2] During these years the first of his major novels, *Sevasadan*, was published and attracted considerable attention from the Hindi reading public, projecting Premchand into great prominence. A translation was immediately made into Gujarati, and some of his stories were translated into Bengali. The first edition of *Sevasadan* was sold out in a year.[3] "Everyone recognized that a new star had risen in the literary firmament."[4] From this time Premchand's name became known; translation carried his writing to a public beyond the Hindi-speaking region.

There were other factors. On the political scene, World War I came to an end in 1918 and fears that the Allies intended to crush Turkey, the residence of the Caliph of Islam, produced anger among the Muslims of India, who were drawn to co-operative efforts with Hindus and thus unified the nationalist struggle against Britain. Immediately after the war the massacre of Jalianwala Bagh in Amritsar occurred, in which a British General Dwyer opened fire on a large crowd enclosed in a walled park. In 1919 the repressive Rowlatt Bills were introduced, giving the government wide powers such as the authority to imprison people without trial. All these events brought Hindus and Muslims together in a joint front against the British and unleashed a national passion of patriotism that swept to the farthest corners of the subcontinent. Finally, Gandhi emerged as leader of the India Nationalist Congress. With his first non-violent action in behalf

2. *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, XII, 341. 3. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 193.
4. Madan, *Premchand: An Interpretation*, p. 45.

of the peasants of Champaran in Bihar (1916), who had been suffering under British indigo planters, he showed that a new kind of leadership had appeared on the national scene.

> With the coming of Gandhi, Premchand's sharp eyes focused on him. With his heartfelt instinctive knowledge he saw the sign that this man would do something. How different from the chair-sitting politicians, this man who believed that the first meaning of politics was service of the people, who goes among suffering people, who tries to understand their problems, and shares in their pain and sorrow, and arousing them, leads them into the struggle.[5]

The impact of Gandhi on Premchand had been perhaps prepared for by the influence upon him of Tolstoi, a selection of whose stories he had already translated. The single stress of love, preached by Tolstoi, with its concomitant teachings of truth, non-violence, giving away of surplus wealth, mercy, forgiveness, appeared in Premchand's stories through this period and left some residue in his work thereafter.[6] The years in Gorakhpur brought Premchand to a new level in his thinking. Gandhi's influence finally brought him to resign from his government job and lifted him to a height from which he could see the nation as a whole. From this position he preached for national unity and permitted no impatience to shift his purpose thereafter. The effect of this purposefulness on his literary work, the burning sense for national resurgence which brought him to accent political education and moral teaching and to slight the artistic means, for a time lowered the quality of his short stories as literature, but at this time he seemed to feel it was greater to be a preacher than a short story writer. For this he has his apologists among Indian critics,[7] and

5. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 165.

6. Amrtrai writes: "He too had read Tolstoi's moral stories, he took their influence into his writing, and prior to Gandhi-ji's coming to the forefront he had translated twenty-three of them with Indian adaptations and published them under the title *Prem Prabhakar*" (*ibid.*, p. 165). A current edition entitled *Talstay-ki Kahaniya* and containing twenty-one stories was published in 1962 by Saraswati Press, Allahabad.

7. E.g., Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, pp. 255–56: "The matter of independence, the subject of the non-co-operation movement must reach the people—the whole business, be it directly or indirectly. At this time Munshiji did not have time to consider the appropriate moment. Don't quibble, the house is on fire—if the story is well-constructed then good, if not, so what? The word has been brought before the people."

justification from the intense political fixation of men's minds at that time.

His resignation from government had a beneficial effect upon Premchand's health. During the days of his subdeputy inspectorship in Hamirpur and Basti, while making his tours, he had contracted a severe case of amoebic dysentery.

> The dysentery settled in me. All day there was tension in me, there was swelling. With great discipline I used to walk four or five miles, I exercised, I dieted, and took all kinds of medicine, but the dysentery would not even hint at leaving me, and my body began to waste away. Several times I went to Kanpur and took treatment, once for a whole month in Allahabad, I tried doctors and Ayurvedic medicine, all to no avail.[8]

His son described Premchand before and after he came down with dysentery in Hamirpur District. Before his illness:

> the handsome, smart young man who had come to Mahoba [capital of the district], with shining blue eyes and fair ruddy color, broad-chested, with strong arms and sturdy legs, with mustaches pointing upward and on his head a Rajput turban.

And then after he had contracted dysentery:

> as one watched the young man became old, the cheeks became sunken in, the eyes sank into hollows, a thin neck stuck upward, his color became yellow, his legs and arms became like twigs, the outstretched mustaches sagged, the clear eyes became blended with yellow. Before, his clothes had fit tightly upon him, now it seemed that they hung from a hook.[9]

The disease had clung to him for some years, sometimes lying dormant, at other times overcoming him with pain. For some years, too, his family life was not very pleasant. His second wife, Sivrani Devi, and his stepmother could not get along. They fought continually, and his wife frequently went home to her father's. Finally, however, she gained the upper hand in the domestic battle which Premchand referred to as

8. *Kafan*, p. 67.

9. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 127.

a "Mahabharata"; the stepmother moved away to stay with one of her sons, and a reasonable state of peace descended on the household. Five children were born, three boys and two girls, but a boy child died of smallpox at the age of eleven months and a daughter at three months of age.

The fact that, while Premchand was a writer, he was also a man is sometimes overlooked by critics who discuss the importance of his work, debate the qualities of realism and idealism, the social purpose, and leave the impression of a grim man trying to change the world with sermons. In reality he was a shy and unassuming man, and in his personal relations with people maintained a constant courtesy. However, among his close friends he was noted for his humor and for his great laugh. This laugh must have been of considerable power.[10] The present writer, visiting Premchand's village in 1965, asked a man of the village, a Kurmi,[11] who lived at least a quarter of a mile away from Premchand's house, if he remembered Premchand. The man said: "Oh yes. I saw him a lot. When he used to laugh in his house we could hear him all over the village." The Hindi accounts written about Premchand by friends abound with the onomatopoeic word "kahkaha," a good imitation of the sound of laughter.

As a teacher and as editor and finally as a publisher, Premchand, while trying to make a living, came into personal contact with many people. It is most striking, however, that wherever he was, however involved in these matters, he followed the profession of writing with a remarkable singleness of purpose.[12] In 1930 when he made his first trip to Delhi, he surprised everyone by saying it was the first time in twenty or thirty years that he had not done some writing every day.[13]

His writing, apart from fiction, was in itself impressive in amount. For *Zamana* of Kanpur he wrote a special column called "Raftar e Zamana" ("The Movement of the Age"), and he sent stories and articles to many other journals in Allahabad, Lahore, Lucknow, Banaras, and elsewhere.[14] The three-volume collection of his non-fictional writings assembled by Amrtrai under the title *Vividh Prasang* repre-

10. Pyarelal Sakir, in Amrtrai, ed., *Premchand Smrti*, p. 128.
11. A sudra caste of weavers.
12. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 167.
13. Jainendra Kumar, in Amrtrai, ed., *Premchand Smrti*, p. 98.
14. Gopal, pp. 72, 80, 84, 178, 218, 250.

sents only a part of this writing, yet it fills more than 1300 pages. The subject matter reveals the range of his interest: the National Stage; the Battle for Independence; the International Stage; War and Peace; Hindu-Muslim; Touchable-Untouchable; Kisan-Laborer; City Administration; the Literary View; Religion and Society; Swadeshi (Native Products); Education and Culture; the Woman's World; the National Language; Festschrift; and Miscellaneous Pieces. A very large proportion of the writing that has been preserved in these volumes appears in the years after Premchand had left government service in 1920, and the single period best represented of all is that from 1930 to the date of his death in 1936. During these last years he had started two journals, *Hans*, a monthly, and *Jagaran*, a weekly. Through these two periodicals, in particular, one can see his daily involvement in the events of the time.

In addition to his greater literary involvement in political events of the twenties and thirties, Premchand's work from this time suggests a more consistent national outlook. He saw the overriding problem of India to be national unity in order to gain national independence. From this time on he fought singlemindedly for what he considered unifying influences and against forces which weakened or disrupted unity.

In 1921, when Premchand resigned from government, the political scene was indeed unusual:

> In those hectic months of early 1921, masses of students left the government-controlled educational institutions, and lawyers of the eminence of C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru gave up their practice, abjured their accustomed luxury, and plunged into the movement. In Nehru's province, the United Provinces, the arrest of three *kisan*[15] leaders caused a vibrant peasant demonstration on January 6th at Rai Bareilly when the police opened fire, killing seven and injuring many more. Next month 70,000 kisans of that province made a spectacular entry into the ranks of non-cooperators. . . . The movement in 1921 soared on the wings of enthusiastic expectancy of the promised Swaraj. More than a *crore* [ten million] of rupees was

15. Peasant.

> collected in the Tilak Swarajya Fund before June was out; the poor gave to it more than their mite, women cast off their jewelery at Gandhiji's behest. The boycott of British imported goods was inaugurated by huge sacrificial bonfires of imported cloth on the seashore at Bombay.[16]

To know what the masses of students, lawyers, kisans, and ornament-sacrificing women did at this time allows us to see that Premchand was not the only one in India who resigned his job in February, 1921. The scene impinged upon every individual, which helps to explain the intensity of his thinking, feeling, and writing about these events of national uprising.[17] The scene also accounts for the creation of hundreds of characters in his stories who resign their government jobs, give up their jewelery, burn their imported clothes, march in processions, and face police bullets. It accounts for his kisans who summon up courage to resist police and *zamindars*.[18]

In his private life Premchand felt guilty for not actively entering the Gandhian campaigns. For years he contemplated going to jail himself. His wife, Sivrani Devi, suspecting that he might attempt to get himself arrested, and fearing for his health, forestalled him by going out and having herself arrested instead. One of them had to stay at home and look after the children.

After resigning from government service in 1921, Premchand revived an interest that had attracted him for several years—the purchase of a press. In spite of his frequent pleas of poverty, he had saved Rs. 4000 from his teaching and writing, and this money he presently used to buy press equipment. He had great confidence in his own business abilities and thought that he had calculated everything to a nicety, but from the start his press brought him only trouble. He borrowed money from various sources, drew others into partnership with him, and watched helplessly as their money, along with his, sank into a

16. Hirendranath Mukerjee, *India Struggles for Freedom* (2nd ed.; Bombay, 1948), pp. 117–19.

17. One sees changes in Nehru's thinking, too, similar to those of Premchand. Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (London, 1947), pp. 69–74.

18. See below, chap. v. A zamindar is a landlord who is a collector of revenues for the government, or sometimes an absentee landlord.

financial quicksand. His letters to Dayanarain Nigam through these years were punctuated with exclamations of harassment.[19] To help extricate himself, he left a business manager in charge of the press while he accepted a job with the Ganga Pustakmala, a publishing firm of Lucknow, to be a literary adviser for Rs. 100 a month. He stayed in Lucknow in this capacity from September, 1924, to September, 1925, putting all the money he could save into his failing business.

During his stay in Lucknow, Premchand's health was good and the publication of his longest novel, *Rangbhumi*, made him famous throughout India. When he returned to Banaras, however, he found the condition of his press unimproved and seemingly unimprovable. He often considered selling it, but he could not bear to think of losing everything he had put into it, and somehow he carried on. Early in 1927 he was invited to Lucknow again, this time at Rs. 200 a month to be the editor of *Madhuri* magazine. Here he stayed for more than five years, from February, 1927, to May, 1932. Thence he returned to his village, Lamhi, and to Banaras.

Premchand's earnings from writing can be estimated to have been from about fifty to eighty rupees per month over the period of his whole career.[20] Of course, the amounts he received after his name became well known were often larger than they had been during the early period of his writing. He is said to have received Rs. 1800 for *Rangbhumi*, published in 1925, "or four times the royalty on *Sevasadan* published six years earlier."[21] His printing press kept him from becoming solvent, and it also made it doubly necessary that his pen should not slacken. He wrote daily in the mornings and in the evenings. Between 1921 and 1932, seven novels were published,[22] and approxi-

19. For example, *Citthi Patri*, I, 123, 148.

20. During the twenty-two years of his teaching career Premchand's salary rose from Rs. 18 to Rs. 85 per month. In 1930 Banarsidas Chaturvedi asked him how much he had earned from his writings to that time, and Premchand's answer indicated that in twenty-seven years of writing his novels and short stories had perhaps earned him from Rs. 50 to Rs. 80, or $17 to $27 a month. Banarsidas Chaturvedi, in Amrtrai, ed., *Premchand Smrti*, p. 242.

21. Gopal, p. 213. It should be realized, however, that *Rangbhumi* was a two-volume novel of immense length.

22. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, pp. 645–56.

mately 130 short stories.[23] Whereas in his early period a majority of his stories had been published in three or four periodicals, notably *Zamana*, his stories after 1921 appeared in a wide variety of journals.[24] While his financial investments threatened him with economic ruin, his investments in writing were bringing him fame.

About the time the novel *Rangbhumi* was being published, five or six agents of the Maharaja of Alwar State came to him with a letter from the Maharaja offering him a position as a writer of his court at a salary of Rs. 400 per month, a car for his use, and a bungalow.[25] In the late 1920's also, an Indian prominent in government circles came to him and told him that the governor of the province, Sir Malcolm Hailey, would offer him the honorary title of Rai Bahadur if he would accept it. Premchand turned down both offers, the latter by saying he was a people's writer and he would take the title of Rai Bahadur when all the people were made Rai Bahadurs.[26]

Premchand's new prominence in literature was illustrated in other ways. He received an award for *Rangbhumi*,[27] his stories and novels began to be translated into other Indian languages and into English, Russian, German, and Japanese.[28] He acquired antagonistic critics who gained some notoriety by accusing him of plagiarism. The novel *Premasram*, said one, was a copy of Tolstoi's *Resurrection*, and *Rangbhumi* was in imitation of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*.[29]

This growing renown came through the writing of fiction which from 1921 to 1932 was remarkable for its close reflection of the events taking place at that time on the Indian scene.[30] However, fame and hard work did not suffice to slow down the decline of his printing press in Banaras. In 1930 he decided to challenge disaster further by launching a monthly periodical called *Hans*, which he hoped would bring more work to his press, would give him an adequate outlet for his views, and at the same time would be so good that it would attract subscribers from everywhere and draw him up out of bankruptcy. By

23. *Ibid.*, 657–64.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Sivrani Devi Premchand, p. 71.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
27. Gopal, p. 213.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 233. See also Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 415.
29. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, pp. 383–87.
30. See below, chap. v.

now, however, his expectations had been humbled enough by experience that he foresaw, even as he plunged ahead, that this enterprise, too, would be a financial failure. "I have moved through life doing foolish things, let there be one more."[31]

In August, 1932, after he returned to Banaras he compounded his troubles by taking on a faltering weekly called *Jagaran*. He wrote about it to Jainendra Kumar, another noted Hindi novelist:

> Meanwhile I have taken on *Jagaran*. *Jagaran* has put out twelve issues but the number of subscribers [under the old editor] has not gone over 200. Vyas advertised a lot but for some reason the paper did not go.
>
> *Hans*'s losses have run to several thousands, but I couldn't resist the desire for a Weekly. I am trying to make it a paper for the ordinary man. There will be a loss of thousands in this, too, but what can I do? Here life is one long loss.[32]

The press and *Hans* and *Jagaran* were fined on two or three occasions because of articles which the government found obnoxious.[33] The fines of from Rs. 1000 to Rs. 2000 each time, added to the regular losses, brought Premchand's financial situation to a point where on one occasion he ran down to Lucknow, "met the Chief Secretary [Mumford], and explained to him the meaning of the story. And I even gave him a testimonial of my loyalty!"[34]

Premchand's growing fame, meanwhile, finally brought him an unexpected offer from a film company in Bombay, the Ajanta Cinetone Company, to come and write scripts for them at a salary of Rs. 8000 per year.[35] This offer was too good to refuse, and he went to Bombay with high hopes at the end of May, 1934. Six months later, however, he wrote to Jainendra Kumar:

> Not one of the intentions I came here with has been fulfilled. These producers will not move a barley-grain's breadth from the methods of making stories which they are accustomed to. They call vulgarity entertainment value. . . . I have written social stories which

31. Premchand, *Citthi Patri*, I, 176.
32. *Ibid.*, II, 26.
33. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, pp. 485, 510.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 510.
35. Premchand, *Citthi Patri*, II, 44.

educated people may want to see too, but these people doubt that they will be successful as films.[36]

One of the pictures he was connected with in Bombay was called "Mazdur," a story which purported to show that great good would come to the country and the public if the capitalists and millionaires would be prompted by generosity and progressive thoughts. The "bones" of the story had been made by the company, and Premchand was asked to put on the "skin and meat."[37] Some scenes were photographed in the textile mill of a friend of the producer, and another scene showed a mob of thousands of workers. The suggestion of labor reform implicit in the picture seemed, however, too explicit to the Board of Censors of Bombay, whose membership according to Amrtrai was heavily weighted with members of the Bombay Millowners' Association.[38] They would not permit the picture to be shown in Bombay. Later, the picture was passed by the Panjab Board of Censors and showed for seven days at the Imperial Theatre in Lahore. News of the censorship in Bombay had spread to Lahore and when the picture opened there,

> A crowd of 60,000 laborers collected at the theater gates—and this condition lasted for seven days. The police and military had to be called in to restrain the crowds. Finally, the Panjab Government got nervous and stopped it.[39]

The picture opened and closed promptly in Delhi, in various places in Uttar Pradesh, and in Madhya Pradesh.[40]

Life in the film world of Bombay became intolerable to Premchand. He broke his contract before it was completed and came back to Banaras.

> It is useless to expect any improvement in the cinema, [he wrote]. This business is in the hands of the same kind of moneymakers as the sellers of liquor. . . . They are concerned only with their money.

36. *Ibid.*, II, 51.
37. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 573.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 574.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 574–75. Premchand himself was persuaded to play a small part as head of the panchayat which was to settle a dispute between mill owners and laborers. He agreed, provided he could wear his ordinary, everyday clothes and would not have to put on any make-up.

> Naked dancing, kissing, and attacks by men on women. In their eyes all this is proper. The humor of the public has fallen so low that if they don't see something shocking or shameless, they get no pleasure from the movie. . . . Through the cinema all the barbarisms of the West are entering into us, and we are helpless.[41]

So thoroughly was Premchand disillusioned with the cinema that he turned down one other film company's offered contract, under which he could stay in Banaras and write the screenplays.[42] On April 4, 1935, he left Bombay, with a saving of Rs. 1400 of the Rs. 6600 he had earned from the films.[43]

He was fifty-five years old when he left Bombay with the rupees to shore up his sagging business. However, his efforts in the past few years had not been confined to movie scripts or to his press alone. As Hindi or Hindustani, under the influence of Gandhi and the Indian National Congress, came to be regarded as the future national language of India, it was natural that Premchand's name should spread outside the Hindi area, where the teaching of Hindi was being introduced in new places. By degrees he had become the most famous writer in the Hindi world.

The political scene in India was quiet at this time, but the prospect that Independence was coming closer turned the minds of more and more men to the question of what should happen after freedom was gained. To Premchand a major problem was that of a national language. The explosive possibilities in the choice of a national language had arisen as Urdu and Hindi came into the political arena as the separate languages of Muslims and Hindus. Premchand, a writer of both Urdu and Hindi, felt increasingly the need for a language that compromised between these two, and this became almost the major concern of the remaining months of his life.[44]

Along with the subject of a national language, Premchand in the last years of his life became active in the promotion of inter-provincial literary exchange. His periodical *Hans* contained a special section devoted to translations and news about the literatures of other provinces,

41. *Citthi Patri*, II, 161–62.
42. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 581.
43. Premchand, *Citthi Patri*, II, 59.
44. For further information about Premchand's views on language, see below, chap. iii.

and though the periodical was a financial failure it had acquired considerable fame throughout the country. It was therefore chosen by a new national literary society called the Bharatiya Sahitya Parisad (Indian Literary Council), founded in 1935 under the chairmanship of Mahatma Gandhi, to be its official periodical publication. In October, 1935, *Hans* came out as the mouthpiece of the Parisad[45] under the editorship of Premchand and K. M. Munshi, a noted writer and politician of Gujarat.

The final high honor of Premchand's life was his invitation to be president of the first annual session of the Progressive Writers' Association to be held in Lucknow in April, 1936. This association had been founded in London by a group of young Indian writers, prominent among whom were Mulk Raj Anand and Sajjad Zahir.[46] Premchand's presidential address at the first session, on the subject "The Aims of Literature," lasted for an hour and a half to two hours.[47]

When he made this speech Premchand was at the peak of his fame. From his words Marxist writers, psychoanalytic critics, idealists, Gandhians, realists, all could find quotations for their later interpretations of his work. Those who knew him as a man are agreed, however, on the kindliness, good humor, and humility of his nature. Many of the leading Hindi writers of today have been introduced to the public through the pages of *Hans*.[48] If they did not keep on writing, he urged them on. Young writers came in awe to see the great writer and found him in a *dhoti*[49] and undershirt, his hair tousled, sitting on the floor, writing. At once he made them feel at home.[50]

During the weeks before and after the Progressive Writers' Association meeting, Premchand traveled to provincial and national conferences all over north India, repeating the refrain of Hindi-Urdu unity and the need for inter-provincial literary exchange. Wherever he went he was garlanded and honored. But his health was not good, he grew

45. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 597. See also Premchand, *Vividh Prasang*, III, 110–11.

46. Premchand, *Vividh Prasang*, III, 136. The claim of Marxist writers that Premchand had been influenced in his last years by Marxist teachings will be discussed in chap. vi.

47. For the text of this speech, see Rahbar, pp. 309–22.

48. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, pp. 486–88.

49. A loose-flowing lower garment like exaggerated diapers.

50. Rsabhacaran Jain, in Amrtrai, ed., *Premchand Smrti*, p. 41.

very tired. It was with relief that he came back from each trip to his home in Lamhi village.

On June 10, 1936, his last completed novel *Godan* was published. Six days later he fell ill and began to vomit blood. He became very weak and was persuaded to go to Lucknow for treatment. There many tests were made, medicines were administered, but his health continued to fail. His biographers say that he had a chronic gastric ulcer. The treatment available to him in Lucknow seemed to have little effect, and one day he said to a friend, the writer, Gangaprasad Misra, "Gangaprasad, I do not think I can be saved. Since I must die let me go now and die among my children."[51]

Back in Banaras he was brought to the old house of the famous nineteenth-century Hindi writer Bharatendu Hariscandra, commonly regarded as the founder of the modern period in Hindi literature. There his closest literary friends, Dayanarain Nigam of *Zamana*, the novelist Jainendra Kumar, and the poet Nirala, came to stay with him in his last days. On his deathbed Premchand began to write a novel *Mangal Sutra*, which was never completed. When he could not sleep, which was often, he continued to write. Sometimes when too weak to write he talked to those who were near. One day he called his wife to him and said:

> "I have something to tell you which I have kept from you. During the time of my first wife I kept another woman whom I left also. Even after you came I kept up some contact with her."
>
> And his wife answered: "Yes, I know."[52]

To Jainendra Kumar he had once written: "I don't believe in God, how can there be belief? You are moving toward belief in God, not only moving but you are becoming a real devotee, while I am becoming a genuine atheist with my doubts."[53] Now on his deathbed he said to him: "At a time like this people think of God. I am trying to think of him. But so far I haven't felt the necessity to trouble him."[54]

On October 8 Premchand fell unconscious. "I was rushing forward to wash him," his wife recalls, "when my brother caught hold of my

51. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 640.
52. Sivrani Devi Premchand, p. 264.
53. *Citthi Patri*, II, 62.
54. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 644.

hand and said, 'Sister, now he is no more. Where are you going?' "[55] He died about 7 or 7:30 that morning.

The news reached Lamhi village. The relatives and caste fellows assembled. A bier was prepared. As the time approached eleven o'clock twenty or twenty-five people . . . followed the body to Manikarnika Ghat.[56]

55. Sivrani Devi Premchand, p. 273.

56. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 652.

Three THE PERIMETERS OF PREMCHAND'S WORK

Premchand wrote approximately three hundred short stories in thirty years. His early stories were written in Urdu, and it was not until 1915 when he was thirty-five years old that his first Hindi short story, "Saut" ("Co-Wife"), appeared in *Saraswati* magazine of Allahabad. Premchand's own references to the changeover from Urdu to Hindi mentioned the precarious financial straits of many of the Urdu periodicals and the difficulties and delays he encountered in getting some of his collections of short stories published. On May 22, 1914, he wrote to Dayanarain Nigam, editor of *Zamana* of Kanpur: "Of all the existing Urdu periodicals, not one has any growth; they all live the lives of dogs."[1] The following year, on September 1, 1915, he again wrote to Nigam: "Now I am practicing the writing of Hindi. There is no living to be made in Urdu now."[2]

This was a compelling enough reason for him to turn to Hindi, but the evidence also suggests that by this time a marked change had taken place in the comparative numerical strength of Urdu and Hindi journals and readers. One significant cause for this was undoubtedly the rise and growth of the Arya Samaj.

> When Dayananda Saraswati established the Arya Samaj in 1875 in North India, Hindu cultural life took a new turn. On all sides arose such subjects as widow remarriage and opposition to caste and child marriages. Dayanand adopted Hindi for this nationwide cultural movement.[3]

There were repercussions from the rise of the Arya Samaj, which,

1. *Citthi Patri*, I, 31. 2. *Ibid.*, I, 46.
3. Devisaran Rastaugi, *Hindi Sahitya-ka Vivecnatmak Itihas* (Dilli, 1952), p. 147.

along with its social reform ideas, also engendered a spirit of Hindu revivalism.

> Communal and cultural bitterness spread. . . . Previously Punjab had been the fortress of Urdu. In the Western districts of the United Provinces Urdu was taught. Even Hindus generally studied Urdu and Persian. More than that, they even read sacred Hindu books in Urdu. . . . Because of the growing movement of Hindu religion and the Hindi language, Urdu was shaken. To the end of the nineteenth century more books were being published in Urdu than in Hindi. At the start of the twentieth century this situation was completely changed. . . . In 1891 the total subscribers to Hindi periodicals was 8,000, to Urdu periodicals 16,253. In 1936 the subscribers to Hindi periodicals numbered 328,880, whereas the subscribers to Urdu periodicals was only 282,485. In 1891 the proportions were: Hindi 31.91 per cent, and Urdu 68.1 per cent. By 1936 it was almost the opposite: Hindi had become 64 per cent and Urdu 36 per cent. In 1890 for the Vernacular Examination Finals only 22.4 per cent of the students sat for Hindi while 78.6 per cent took Urdu. By 1938, the proportions were: Hindi 56.8 per cent, Urdu 43.2. In the same way the publication of books in 1889–90 showed 561 Urdu books and 361 Hindi; whereas in 1935–36, Urdu put out only 252 books and Hindi 2,139.[4]

Thus, 1915 was an auspicious time to make the change from Urdu to Hindi. This does not imply, however, that Premchand ceased writing for Urdu periodicals;[5] he continued to do so to the time of his death, and himself translated or had translated many of his Hindi works into Urdu.[6] He is thus regarded by Urdu literary historians as perhaps the leading modern Urdu novelist of the first three decades of the twentieth century.[7] Nevertheless, from 1915 and particularly

4. Laksminarayan Sudhansu, "Paristhitiya," *Hindi Sahitya-ka Brhat Itihas* (Kasi [Banaras]; 1957) III, Pt. I, 9–10.

5. For details of his continued Urdu writing, see Surendra Anand, *Premchand: Kahanikar* (Ilahabad, 1964), pp. 55–58, 67–75.

6. His last known short story, "Krikat Maic," was published posthumously in the Urdu journal *Zamana* in 1937.

7. Shaista Akhtar Banu Suhrawardy, *A Critical Survey of the Development of the Urdu Novel and Short Story* (London, 1945), p. 242. See also Anand, p. 55.

from 1917 when his first collection of Hindi stories, *Sapt Saroj*, was published, he regarded himself as primarily a Hindi writer.

In less than a decade after this change, the growing rift between Hindus and Muslims in India had drawn the language problem into the political arena and converted it into a politico-religious-linguistic problem. Urdu is written in the Perso-Arabic script and Hindi in Devanagari, the script of Sanskrit. Urdu and its literature had leaned heavily toward the Middle East where Persian and Arabic offered an extensive dictionary of words and syntactic tendencies from which Urdu could borrow. Hindi could find new vocabulary and Indo-Aryan phraseology in Sanskrit. Islam had been promulgated in the Arabic script; Hinduism had all its revered texts in Devanagari. Thus, when Hindu-Muslim riots flared up in the cities of India in the wake of poltical divergence, it was not difficult to tie the language problem to religion.

Premchand personally had no part in drawing the language into religious and political contexts.[8] He knew both languages well enough to be the leading writer of both during his time. Furthermore, while the nature of his own language certainly changed from an earlier heavy borrowing of Perso-Arabic words, it did not move in consequence to an indiscriminate use of Sanskrit *tatsams*.[9] "A living language," Premchand said to an audience in South India, "grows and thrives like a living body. You can save a language's virtue by locking it up in a building; but only by giving up its health. . . . Our ideal should be such that the largest number of people can understand it."[10]

The largest number of people meant all Indians, and the fundamental tenet of Premchand's views on language became the question of a national language.

> Everyone agrees that in order to make a country firm and strong, it is most necessary to have cultural unity. And the language and script of any nation is a special part of this cultural unity. . .without a national language the existence of a nation cannot be imagined.[11]

8. See below, chap. v, for his views on the communal problem.

9. Words taken directly from Sanskrit without any change in their form.

10. Quoted in Kailascand Bhatiya, "Premchand-ki Bhasa Saili," in Surescand, ed., *Upanyaskar Premchand* (Dilli, 1966), p. 160.

11. "Urdu, Hindi aur Hindustani," *Kuch Vicar* (Ilahabad, 1961), p. 101.

He made clear first of all that English could not be the language of India.

> Even the biggest Anglophiles here have never considered English for our national language. . . . Every slave country takes its master's language and makes it his own. If a Bengali raises a parrot, its national language becomes Bengali. The children of that parrot, if raised in some Hindi speaker's house, will make Hindi the mother tongue. Finally the parrot forgets its original language to the extent of never saying "Te-Te" anymore.
>
> In this very way some new types of Indians forget Hindi to the extent that they even write letters to their mothers and fathers in English. After returning from England it is common to say "ṭum"[12] instead of "tum" [you].[13]

Since Hindi-Urdu had numerically the largest number of speakers in the country, it was the obvious choice as the national speech. About it, Premchand wrote:

> It cannot be that Urdu which is loaded with the weight of non-current and unfamiliar words from Arabic and Persian, and not that Hindi which is filled with difficult Sanskrit words. If the protagonists of these two languages stood face to face and talked in their literary language, probably one would understand nothing of the other's speech.[14]

Premchand, following Gandhi, recommended that Hindustani be the national language. Thinking in terms of Hindustani for the whole country, he acknowledged that most of the provincial languages carry a large proportion of words derived from Sanskrit, and though they all contain some words of Perso-Arabic origin, these are much fewer; but there should be no fear of bringing in and using any word that has been accepted in common usage among the public. Language with lots of simple, current words of Sanskrit derivation would undoubtedly form a large part of the vocabulary of this language. That speech which was heavily larded with Perso-Arabic words would not be understood

12. The retroflex *ṭ* instead of the dental *t* is often used in literature to identify an Englishman.

13. *Vividh Prasang*, III, 273.

14. *Kuch Vicar*, p. 104.

except in a few parts. Muslims from outside Uttar Pradesh spoke the languages of their provinces and wrote in the scripts of those languages, so that these Muslims would have little difficulty with common Sanskrit-derived words.[15]

Nevertheless, he says elsewhere that the creation of a national language "can happen when we leave our fascination for Hindi or Persian and with open mind accept the current words of every language."[16] Hindustani he saw as a language that at the level of everyday speech was understood both by Urdu and Hindi speakers. By mixing the two languages with words already in common use, one language would result.[17]

> We can say that this mixed Hindustani will not be so attractive, sweet and mellifluous and soft. But the judgment of what is sweet and soft constantly changes. A few years ago the combination of an English-style hat with an *achkan* seemed unfitting and ridiculous. But today this is seen everywhere. . . . Moreover, the basic virtue of a language is not its sweetness, but the chief virtue is its ability to make clear its ideas. If by sacrificing sweetness and softness we can expand the area of our national language, we should not be ashamed. . . . When every aspect of our lives is being changed, and often being changed against our wishes—then why, where language is concerned, do we have to remain with the thoughts and viewpoints of a hundred years ago?[18]

It can be seen from the above discussion that Premchand was deeply concerned with the formation of a national language as the foundation stone of national unity. This language he conceived of as based on the common speech of Urdu and Hindi speakers in Uttar Pradesh. The language would be open to the vocabularies and even grammatical changes that other provincial languages might bring to it. Essentially it was a language through which large numbers of people could read their literature. If into this language were brought about two thousand Sanskrit words used commonly in Hindi books and periodicals, and a similar number of Persian words used commonly in Urdu, the basis of an adequate joint vocabulary could be formed.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
16. *Vividh Prasang*, III, 283.
17. *Kuch Vicar*, p. 110.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 112, 113.

"There is no great expansion or firmness yet in the Urdu and Hindi languages. The number of their words is limited. Commonly we do not find the proper word to express an ordinary idea. With this increase of words this complaint can be overcome."[19] The vexing question of script he thought would solve itself if students in the areas involved were made to study both scripts up to the tenth class; then "to my view in some time educated society would be expert in both scripts and that script which seemed to them most correct, easy, and clear would come into use."[20]

Turning to Premchand's own language as used in his novels and short stories, the common impression is that his language, though written in the Devanagari script, was essentially Urdu. It would seem, on the contrary, that Premchand practiced what he preached: that he wrote a language understandable to both Hindi and Urdu speakers, the language that he called Hindustani. This language he considered to be the essence of both Urdu and Hindi.

It is clear, however, that Premchand the writer of fiction in Hindi had to face greater difficulties than Premchand the writer of nonfiction. For instance, in relation to his characters, who were drawn from a variety of levels of education, caste, religion, and region, he was involved in a complex pattern of language. A small measure of this complication is explained by the Hindi critic Premnarayan Tandan. Tandan first divides Premchand's characters into city dwellers and village dwellers. Taking the villagers first, he lists Hindus and Muslims. Usually Hindus and Muslims in the villages speak the same language with only the addition of a few Sanskrit or Perso-Arabic tatsams. The village Hindus are of two kinds: the twice-born castes generally brahman or *thakur*[21] whose vocabulary is sometimes sprinkled with Sanskrit words; and the sudras, comprising most of the farmers who speak a language of generally the same type as the other villagers without the Sanskrit or Persian marks of prestige. The city characters are Muslims and Hindus, using Perso-Arabic or Sanskrit tatsam words frequently. But in this respect Premchand changed as he developed. His early Muslims spoke a language so full of Persian and Arabic words that

19. *Ibid.*, p. 110. 20. Premchand, *Vividh Prasang*, III, 264.

21. The word *thakur* can have various meanings—a deity, man of high rank, or as implied here, a Rajput or other person of ksatriya caste status.

an average Hindi reader could not understand it. Later Premchand used words which were commonly known to both Hindus and Muslims. The Hindus used Sanskrit words but the amount varied with character and situation. He also brought in occasional words from a local dialect to make real a certain type of village low-caste person, and he introduced Gujaratis, or Marathas, or Bengalis, who ignored rules of gender or made fine blunders in agreement between subject and verb.[22]

In general, however, Tandan says that between 1922 and 1936

> there is a great difference in the language. At the time of *Premasram* [1922] Hindi protagonists made great efforts toward increasing the number of Sanskrit tatsams and Urdu protagonists the number of Perso-Arabic tatsams. At the time of *Godan* [1936] the movement to write in the current language under the name of "Hindustani" was at its height. For that reason the language is generally of one kind whether the character be Hindu or Muslim, woman or man, literary or non-literary.[23]

Premchand's expressed views about language, and its practice in his writing, suggest a desire for a language that was both eclectic and simple, in order that it might have the largest number of readers. It was said of him that he "presented a style which makes clear the all-regional nature of Hindi"[24] by accommodating it to Hindus, Muslims, and low-caste villagers, to different regions and different classes of society. Often he used cultural rather than linguistic methods to make words of Perso-Arabic or Sanskrit origin appear natural to readers.

> One great specialty of Premchand's language is that it changed its forms according to the material, the characters, and the period. In *Karmabhumi*, when Dr. Santikumar talks with an Urdu-speaking person his speech becomes Urdu-ized. . . . This same Santikumar, when he talks to Sukhda [a Hindu woman], his speech becomes exceedingly soft and Sanskrit-ized.[25]

22. Premnarayan Tandan, "Bhasa aur Saili Sambandhi Prayog," in Tandan, ed., *Premchand: Krtiya aur Kala* (Lakhnau, 1954), pp. 256–63.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 267. 24. Bhatiya, p. 171.
25. Rajnath Sarma, *Premchand: Alocnatmak Adhyayan* (2nd ed.; Agra, 1962), p. 126.

Further illustrating the wide base or eclectic nature of Premchand's language is his openness to outside influences. Many English words that had seeped into the everyday speech of the people appear: daktar, pulis (police); motar, jel (jail); minit, dipti (deputy); fis (fees); apil (appeal); some five hundred words that tell eloquently of the infiltration of English administration, law, education, and the army into the countryside.[26]

To make this language simple, a people's language, Premchand discarded as many words as possible that were difficult or academic. This was true of both Perso-Arabic and Sanskrit words. As a part of his simplification he often employed forms used in village dialects, forms whose Sanskrit or Persian origins were recognizable, but which had been altered through time to suit the comfort of village tongues. These were invariably short words. The Sanskrit tatsam *prasad* became *parsad, darśan* became *darsan, grhasta—girast, bhram—bharam, avtar—atar, varsa—barkha.* Persian *umr* became *umir, fikr—fikar, kharc—kharac, jaidad—jaijat.*[27]

Stylistic aspects of Premchand's efforts to simplify his language have not always pleased his critics:

> In order to make his ideas obvious he continually made use of "like," "thus," "as if." From this it appears that his intent was only to make some stated subject more clear. . . . But in many places it seems unnatural and unnecessary. In following this metaphorical device the difficulty presented is that he passes out of the bounds of naturalness; instead of being beautiful his writing appears ugly and uninteresting.[28]
>
> In addition to this his sentences are usually short. By this method his display of feeling has certainly been made simpler and clearer, but it has placed a barrier in the way of its flow. In his works, whether novels or short stories, the flow of language is disturbed. The emotional objective becomes distorted. Each sentence appears before us containing just one idea, each sentence cut off from the other. One

26. Bhatiya, p. 170. 27. *Ibid.*

28. Jagannath Sarma, "Premchand-ki Bhasa aur Saili," in Tandan, ed., *Premchand Krtiya aur Kala,* p. 230.

has no unity with the next. This happens especially where narration has to be used or where a subject has to be explained.[29]

Premchand's stylistic and linguistic efforts presented certain other problems of expression that would require far more detailed research than can be given here. They are problems of a cultural nature which have their linguistic reflection. One of these problems is revealed in such statements of critics as: "Where Premchand flows with emotion, poetry comes in his language and the Perso-Arabic language is left behind. . . . The pointed words of Sanskrit also make smooth the flowing speech-stream of Premchand. . . ."[30] "When Santikumar speaks to Sukhda, his speech becomes exceedingly soft and Sanskritized."[31] The implication suggested here that Sanskrit, meaning Hindi heavily powdered with Sanskrit tatsams, must be used for sweet and flowing sounds, whereas Perso-Arabic, meaning Urdu with many Persian and Arabic tatsams, somehow lacks the sweetness and the flow—this is a subjective decision of the kind that could excite Hindu-Muslim antagonism. Premchand, no doubt, would have disagreed with the above critics about the comparative sweetness of Sanskritized Hindi and Persianized Urdu, and yet in certain other respects, despite the Persian-Muslim influences in his background, despite his agnosticism and the strong nationalism which wanted to soothe communal hatreds, he was still a Hindu, and it would appear that to express some things he turned naturally to Sanskrit. For expression of such emotions as reverence, respect, duty, love, and even beauty, he seemed to turn by instinct to Hindu culture. It was as if out of a culture heavily scented with sacred prescriptions about duty, love, reverence, respect, and beauty, the connotations of words had not had time to secularize themselves.[32] He regarded woman as mother not as sweetheart, and perhaps Urdu with a tradition of rose petals and wine and ladies of pleasure could not provide words for the kind of love he idealized.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 233. 30. Bhatiya, pp. 174, 170.

31. Rajnath Sarma, p. 126. This reflects a common pro-Sanskrit prejudice which considers Sanskrit as necessary to say something "soft" or lofty or very polite.

32. This is not to imply that Sanskrit had no secular or light literature, but rather that Sanskrit literature had its greatest impact in India through adaptation into the vernaculars of such texts as the Ramayana and Mahabharata, which created many of the human ideals most admired by Hindus and conveyed those ideals in words that were of Sanskrit origin.

Nevertheless, the total picture of Premchand's language shows that essentially he abided by his beliefs that a national language, Hindustani, should be that language which the common people, educated or uneducated, spoke to each other. This language was not Urdu as is commonly alleged, though it contained many Perso-Arabic words. Neither was it a Hindi made exclusive by the use of specialized Sanskrit words. It was a language that came as close as possible to healing communal wounds, if language could have done it. Premchand's language still lives in the speech even of educated men in Uttar Pradesh. It can be seen in the novels, plays, and short stories of some writers, but almost everywhere else, in newspapers, textbooks, and in most of the critics of Premchand, it appears to be dying.

Sanskrit is not, and is said never to have been, a spoken language of the masses of the people, but its wealth of literature and the intricacies of thought in which it has evolved its vast vocabulary have given it an immense prestige. It lies like an inexhaustible warehouse of words, ready to supply any wants in the current languages. The styles of Hindi in modern India vary in proportion to their temptation to call up words straight from the Sanskrit warehouse. Fiction, it is true, must be more self-controlled than literary criticism, but authors who like to delve into subtleties of the mind or who indulge in lengths of exposition are frequently tempted to go to Sanskrit.

It seems, however, as in the early cases of Buddhism and Jainism, and in the later medieval case of the bhakti poets who used the vernaculars to spread their beliefs, that Sanskrit was inadequate to the needs of a mass circulation. Those who wanted a public had to go rather to the vernaculars where the language had built up its connotations and denotations from life.

> As a general rule [even in olden times], Sanskrit was not the language of the family. It furnished no subconscious symbols for the impressions which we receive in childhood nor for the emotions which form our character in early adolescence. Sanskrit was therefore deprived from an area of life whence the poetry of what I would call the natural languages derives much of its strength.[33]

33. *An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry: Vidyakara's Subhasita—Ratnakosa*, trans. Daniel H. H. Ingalls (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. 6.

Furthermore, the vast vocabulary of Sanskrit which can provide an extraordinary list of synonyms for most words appears to have, as an "artificial" language, far weaker powers of discrimination of meaning. "Each word in English has connotations that it cannot shed and that permit it to be used only in an appropriate social and emotional setting," whereas in Sanskrit many synonyms are said to be indistinguishable from each other in meaning.[34] Some of this quality of rigidness to a meaning prescribed by grammarians and lexicographers rather than by growth within a living language has crept into modern Hindi writing. A woman may be described as beautiful in fifteen adjectives, all of which mean the same thing.[35] This may give diversity of rhyme and measure and increase the pleasures of sound, but it seems to make it "lacking in what is perhaps the chief force of English poetry: its kinesthetic effect."[36]

The argument cannot be upheld in full, for a Sanskrit word brought into a living language must acquire its private meanings in time. It also can be said that centuries of Sanskrit in the background and foreground of life in India have caused the language to enter the perceptions of multitudes of people. Nevertheless, it does seem that a large number of the thousands of Sanskrit tatsams reinstated without change of form into modern Hindi prose have been brought in unnecessarily to replace *tadbhavs*[37] or Perso-Arabic or even English words that have borne the erosion of time and belong naturally to the language. Furthermore, Sanskrit words with their prestige, nurtured by centuries of exclusiveness, appear to many writers to be in bad company if set side by side with a tadbhav, and to avoid this, more tatsams are drawn in to make a syntactical parade that finally can delight the hearts of Sanskrit pandits alone.

Hindi literature entered its modern phase during the time of Bharatendu Hariscandra (1850–85). It was through Hariscandra that prose became for the first time a strongly established literary form.[38] Though

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

35. This may be partly the fault of extant Hindi dictionaries which do not provide information to discriminate meanings subtly.

36. *Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry*, p. 7.

37. A word that has evolved from an original Sanskrit word, changing through prakritic stages into its contemporary form.

38. Durgasankar Misra, *Hindi Sahitya-ka Itihas* (Lakhnau, 1961), p. 223.

he died at the early age of thirty-five, Hariscandra made a great impact on Hindi literature. Through his many works and through his *Hariscandra's Magazine* he introduced to the public most of the modern prose forms. Before Premchand he made popular a form of Hindi that was close to the common speech, and which admitted freely into its vocabulary such Perso-Arabic or English words that were well established in common usage.[39] In addition, his impulse brought into the field of literature a devoted body of men, a large percentage of whom were editors or connected with periodicals,[40] men interested in the current problems of the day, and through them the numbers of periodicals in Hindi increased rapidly. Between 1873 and 1900 from 300 to 350 periodicals are said to have started publication.[41]

Between these years (1873–1900), Hindi felt the effects of the new political, social, and religious events which were then stirring the subcontinent. The Arya Samaj, claiming a direct lineal heritage from the Vedas; the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885, which gave a national focus to men's thoughts; the teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Vivekananda, which gave Indians the feeling that they could be modern and still be Indians; the researches into the ancient literature of India done by foreign Sanskrit scholars, among whom was Max Mueller; these and many other forces profoundly influenced the educated inhabitants of the country.[42]

Such brief and arbitrary references to a few selected men and movements serve only to suggest a political and social mood that filtered from life into literature. This mood is reflected strongly in the Hindi literature during and following the time of Bharatendu Hariscandra. The drama, the novel, the essay—breakaways from the almost complete rule of poetry—found in political awakening, in social reform, in the new knowledge of India's past, in moral teaching, and in reform, a release in subject matter and literary forms from the rigidly set patterns which had been the legacy of Hindi literature from the preced-

39. *Ibid.* See also K. B. Jindal, A *History of Hindi Literature* (Allahabad, 1955), pp. 224–25.

40. Somnath Bhatt, *Hindi Sahitya-ka Itihas Digdarsan* (Poona, 1965), pp. 64–65.

41. Misra, p. 224.

42. Laksminarayan Lal, *Hindi Kahaniyo-ki Silpa-Vidhi-ka Itihas* (2nd ed.; Ilahabad, 1960), pp. 39–41.

ing age. These new forms were Western forms, and the ideas that flowed through them also brought into the creation of literature current Western thought.

The short story as it is now conceived is not mentioned as one of the new forms introduced during the Bharatendu period. There were in this period many rudimentary story types of prose, such as "ironic sketches. . . comic sketches and dream sketches,"[43] but it is not until 1900 that a prose piece was written which is credited by Indian critics as being the first Hindi short story. This story, "Indumati" by Kishorilal Goswami,[44] appeared in *Saraswati* magazine of Allahabad.

Saraswati magazine, established in 1900 and following quickly in the wake of the founding of the *Nagari Pracharini Sabha* (1896) in Banaras, performed the very important function of introducing this new form into Hindi. In the ensuing years (it is still being published) *Saraswati, Sudarshan* of Banaras (1900), *Indu* of Banaras (1909), and *Hindi Galpa Mala* of Banaras (1918) formed a quartet of periodicals which introduced perhaps most of the prominent short story writers of the first three decades of the twentieth century.[45] *Saraswati* magazine for twenty years was under the editorship of Mahavirprasad Dwivedi, who is highly honored by literary historians for his important service to Hindi language and literature. To him is given a major share of the credit for bringing a degree of uniformity into Hindi prose, for introducing punctuation in the interests of clarity, replacing local or provincial words for those with a wider circulation, and opposing severely the use of obscenity.[46]

The first short stories, those written from 1900 to about 1909, are thought of as belonging to a learning period. In them, while there is plot and character and conflict, and while they tried various styles of composition (straight narration, stories in the form of letters, diaries, and biographies, etc.) within these bounds, their subject matter often dealt largely with unearthly events; plots were helped along by surprises, amazing coincidence, dreams, magic; there was also often some unrelated moralizing and considerable sentimentality. Even when a social problem was presented it was felt necessary to make it palatable with strange events and the use of magic to accomplish them.[47]

43. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 52–69.
46. Misra, p. 226.
47. Laksminarayan Lal, pp. 56–57.

In the years immediately preceding Premchand's entrance into Hindi literature, a large number of translations of English and Bengali stories appeared in Hindi periodicals. These writings helped to bring the Hindi short story into public appreciation, and as the number of periodicals increased, so did the number of writers, and through many pens there grew up an extensive and varied short story literature.

When Premchand came to Hindi literature, the mark of his Urdu and Hindi (in translation) predecessors was upon him, but he was so influenced by all the movements of his time, political, social, and literary, that he soon strove to depict the real world he saw around him. His lifetime (1880–1936) spanned the core years of the Indian nationalist movement. The great Indian leaders of that period—Tilak, Gokhale, Vivekananda, Dayananda Saraswati, Gandhi—inevitably held the focus of national attention. Following these leaders most Indians believed that nationalism stipulated three major aims: political independence, social reform, and the refurbishment of Indian tradition. These objectives, which hopefully would lead to a free land, a morally justifiable land, and a distinctively Indian land, were clear and noble ideals for politicians and social or religious reformers. For writers of fiction such objectives held obvious dangers. While nationalism grew in intensity it commanded not only the subject matter of fiction but molded its plots, controlled its characterization, and ensured that its endings served the purposes of didacticism and polemic. A glance at Premchand's writing clearly shows how his fiction was compromised by nationalism. The prime insistence on political and social aims often tended to submerge the aesthetic effects of his work.

Fortunately, this is only a partial estimate. The nationalist struggle went on longer than the usual war. It allowed time for men to grow up and grow old, and for slogans to become stale and change. It rose in tides of enthusiasm that ebbed in frustration. As a man who wrote something every day for thirty years, Premchand had time to reappraise his literary aims and to question his techniques.

In his early years he called himself an "idealistic realist."[48] However,

48. *Kuch Vicar*, p. 30. "The idealists," he wrote, "ask what is the value of showing the realistic shape of the real? We see that with our own eyes. . . . Idealists do not regard literature as a mirror of society, but as a light. The ancient literature of India supported this idealism. We also should cultivate the habits of idealism. Of course, realism should be so mingled with it that it may not go far from the truth."

in a study of the whole sweep of Premchand's work from 1907 to 1936 there is clear evidence that while his early work stressed "idealism," his later work showed greater concern that "realism should be. . . mingled with it." The terms "idealism" and "realism" as Premchand used them suggest a struggle between stressing his didactic purposes and concealing them, between lesson-teaching and artistry.

The stories develop through three major stages. In the early period, from 1907 to 1920, they are didactic stories set in romantic environments. They are fashioned from lofty, generalized ideals of patriotism. The stories of the middle period (1920–1932) are also didactic but are placed in realistic contemporary settings. Their predominant subjects are nationalism, social reform, and respect for Indian tradition. The plots are contrived upon the specific social and economic programs suggested primarily by Tolstoi and Gandhi. The themes of Premchand's final stories, those published between 1932 and 1936, are more various. The moral accent and the point of view shift from the dictated prescriptions of the author to the individual problems of the fictional characters.

The question of Premchand's development may perhaps be profitably observed in the context of his definition of "idealistic realism." His social, political, and tradition-mending aims made for complications in his growth as a writer. In a story from the early period, "Pachtawa" ("Regret"), for example, the aim is as follows: a zamindar who is ruthless, tyrannical, and inconsiderate of the villagers must be led to see the error of his ways and realize that by sympathy and kindness he can get his taxes and loans paid up quickly, easily, and pleasantly. To make this change of heart believable is an elementary but basic problem of literature, and the manner of its solution may make the difference between a government pamphlet and a work of art. It posed a problem which Premchand was not able to solve, or did not care to solve, in much of his writing.

Since his aim in writing was reform, he tended to see his story from outside. The moral of the story being dominant, characters were forced to do things which in the ordinary expectations of life they would not do. The zamindar at first had no good qualities; the author does not plant any possibilities of reform in his character. Instead, Premchand was forced to build an elaborate set of events to create a situation that

would make it possible—even if not probable—for the zamindar to see the error of his ways. In "Pachtawa" he provided an honest, sympathetic zamindar's agent, who by his noble example and teachings persuaded the villagers to go voluntarily to the zamindar and pay up all their back taxes. Anyone knowing real Indian farmers—and no one knew them better than Premchand—would find this unbelievable. Furthermore, Premchand lengthened the story to enable the zamindar to grow old and feeble and finally to be softened by his confrontation with death and worries over the future of his young son. Only then could the story come to an end.

The elaboration of event rather than the development of character, in addition to creating characters who had to betray their true natures in order to let the story come out according to the author's public views, made many of his early stories, and some of his later ones, very long. "Pachtawa" had nine parts. In a story "Alagyojha" ("Separate Arrangements," 1929) three generations of one family pass in review. Parts often begin with the words: "Five years passed," or "Since this event occurred, five years have passed." A singleness of effect, which Premchand much later in his career professed as a prime requirement of the good short story, is not achieved in much of his work because of these faults.

Despite all this, one of the qualities of Premchand that commands admiration is his unusual fertility of invention. For any particular lesson he had to teach he strung together a wide variety of plots. To show the mendacity and greed of certain brahmans, for example, he involved them in helping the British rulers break up a nationalist *satyagraha* struggle,[49] in swindling villagers by promising to double their cash by mystic means,[50] or in ruining a farmer through the penances they set for the accidental killing of a cow.[51] Through this fertility of invention emerged every imaginable type of plot whose events and conflict were drawn out of an intimate knowledge of the country in which he lived. The extent and the detail of his description, judged apart from fictional

49. Premchand, "Satyagraha" ("Truth Force"), *Mansarovar* (8 vols.; Ilahabad, 1962), III, 282–96. *Satyagraha* is the Gandhian method of resisting non-violently any objectionable laws.

50. Premchand, "Neur" (a man's name), *ibid.*, II, 275–85.

51. Premchand, "Muktimarg" ("The Path of Release"), *ibid.*, III, 233–44.

quality, would probably justify the use of his stories as an adjunct to any factual study of India during the first third of the twentieth century.

It is, however, perhaps in Premchand's stories of the village that there appear the first signs of his gradual change of stress from teaching a lesson to telling a story. Premchand knew the village well. He was born in one, and as subdeputy inspector of schools he wandered from village school to village school through the poverty-stricken districts of eastern Uttar Pradesh for several years. His desire to see the poor peasant receive a fair share of the gains produced by his work led him in his earlier stories to seek the inspiration of Tolstoi, the Arya Samaj, Gandhi, and Ruskin, and through their teachings of love, mercy, self-denial, non-violent soul force, self-reliance, and social equality to make evil landlords, corrupt police officials, and greedy priests see the error of their ways and become kindly fathers of their people.[52] He also created—especially in his novels—idealistic nationalist reformers who went into the villages to teach landlords to be good and peasants to be brave. And neither the landlords nor the reformers made convincing fictional characters.

The fact that Premchand knew the villagers well, however, enabled him to portray them with great truth. He knew their language, their humor, their selfishness, their cowardice, and even in earlier village stories, when he confined the story conflicts to the village without reference to the outside world, he achieved a high measure of fictional verity. During the last three or four years of his life he also wrote a series of stories sometimes connected with village life, but usually set in city or town, which show clearly that he had reached a new conception of the purpose of the short story.[53] The author's objectives are no longer pointed with hortatory passion at the problems of independence, social reform, and tradition-reviving; they point rather to the human concerns of individual people.

In most of his work up to this time he may be considered as a writer who gave a broad description of the surface of Indian life. One might say of him what an American critic said of James T. Farrell: "His prose is asked to perform no service beyond communication of the most

52. Premchand, "Updes" ("The Lesson"), *ibid.*, VIII, 279–300.
53. See below, pp. 133–34.

rudimentary kind of fact. For his ambitions the style of the newspaper and the lens of the documentary camera would be adequate. . . ."[54]

The extent of Premchand's application of technique in his late stories was not any vast and subtle conception that would try to "help us to discover and to evaluate our subject matter, and more than that, to discover the amplifications of meaning of which our subject matter is capable."[55] Premchand's Banaras is not as James Joyce's "Dublin, in Ulysses, . . . a moral setting: not only a city portrayed in the naturalistic fashion of Dickens' London, but also a map of the modern psyche with its oblique and baffled purposes."[56] It can only be said that Premchand now made steps toward being "objective about subjective states," and not merely as heretofore "to be objective about the circumstantial surfaces of life."[57]

As he moved into the thoughts and emotions of his characters, his work took on a measure of depth and resonance. But his psychological dimension was never of the "oblique and baffled purposes" of the modern Western psyche. His was a simpler world. There was hunger, poverty, stark economic injustice, rigid social barriers. The response to these things brought out vengeance and love and sorrow and anger —direct, predictable, uncomplicated emotions, and it can only be said that because these emotions and feelings now came from the individual to the problem instead of from the problem to the individual, a new life and significance lighted up the subject matter. It changed a story of poverty or of widowhood from a social document into a story of individual pain or sorrow, from a third-person description to a first-person experience.

Premchand began to write these new stories consistently only three or four years before his death. But long before that he was the most famous writer in Hindi. His stories spread out a landscape that was filled with contemporary Indian scenery. He did not go deeply into the individual mind, but he had a vast knowledge of the collective and private habits and practices, troubles and pleasures, of a whole countryside which he translated into stories. He brought this world to life

54. Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," in William Van O'Connor, ed., *Forms of Modern Fiction* (Bloomington, Ind., 1961), p. 24.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
57. *Ibid.*

with a supple and vital language, great wit and satire, deep sympathy and understanding. He grew and matured as a writer. His death occurred when he appeared about to start on the greatest phase of his career. The story that is often called his best, "Kafan" ("The Shroud"), was written in the year he died.

Four LITERARY TRANSITIONS, 1907–1920

Premchand did his first extensive reading in Urdu. Years later, when writing about his first piece of creative writing, he said:

> At this time my age was about thirteen. I did not know any Hindi at all. I had a passion for reading Urdu novels. Maulana Sharar, Pandit Ratannath Sarsar, Mirza Rusva, Maulvi Muhammad Ali of Hardoi were the most popular novelists of that time. Whenever I got those works, I forgot all about school. . . .[1]

It is not surprising, therefore, that the influence of his Urdu writing predecessors should be evident in his early short stories. The criticism of Urdu literature is sometimes made that it sought its inspiration outside India and was more familiar with Baghdad than Banaras. One writer has said of Urdu poetry in particular and of Urdu literature in general that it "is not only Persian in form and conception, but is also Persian in feeling, in tone, in imagery and even in local coloring. . . . The manners, customs, rites, superstitions and ideals are all foreign."[2] While this statement undoubtedly overstates the case, it must be admitted that the influence of Persian and Middle Eastern subject matter gave to pre-Premchand Urdu literature much of its distinguishing flavor. The Urdu writers whose novels Premchand read when he was thirteen years old all had qualities that derived from outside India, even though their settings may have been Indian. Maulana Sharar (1860–1926) wrote historical novels that were weak in history, but dealt almost exclusively with the past glories of Islam.[3] Pandit Ratan-

1. Premchand, *Kafan*, p. 50.
2. Hardev Bahri, *Persian Influence on Hindi* (Allahabad, 1960), p. 11.
3. Suhrawardy, pp. 66–67.

nath Sarsar (1846–1902) wrote of Lucknow, but largely of the hangers-on of courts. The hero goes to Constantinople to fight the Turks. The world of prostitutes, decadent nawabs and sheikhs created a romanticism that was reminiscent of Persia.[4] Hadi Hasan Rusva's[5] most famous novel, *Umrao Jan Ada*, is about a well-known prostitute of Lucknow who recalls her past in the "Nawabi" era of the city.[6]

Premchand's earliest short stories in particular show some of this Persian-type influence. His first, "Dunya-ka Sab-se Anmol Ratna" ("The Most Precious Gem in the World," 1907), tells of a lover and his beloved, both of whom have Persian names. The beloved says she will not give her love until the lover brings to her the most precious gem in the world. The lover then goes on long journeys. He brings back the tear of remorse of a man about to be hanged, the ashes of a young wife who has immolated herself on the funeral pyre of her husband, and the last drop of blood shed by a Rajput for his country.[7] He hopes that each of these might turn out to be the most precious gem in the world.

Among the books translated for the Fort William College (founded in 1800 in Calcutta) as textbooks for teaching Urdu to young English officials of the East India Company was one entitled *Araish-i-Mahfil*, translated from the Persian by Ser Ali Afsos,[8] which suggests an early pattern for the above story of Premchand. *Araish-i-Mahfil* tells of a wealthy merchant's daughter who says she will marry the man who can answer her seven questions or riddles, such as: "Why was a certain man heard to say, 'I have seen it once and desire to do so again'? . . . Do good and throw it in the river. . . . Bring a pearl of the size of an ostrich's egg."[9]

The Persian-Urdu influence[10] is also noticeable in such of Prem-

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 31 ff.

5. Manmathnath Gupta gives his name as Muhammad Hadi Ruswa (*Premchand: Vyakti aur Sahityakar* [Ilahabad, 1961], p. 82.)

6. Mirza Muhammad Hadi Ruswa, *Umrao Jan Ada: Courtesan of Lucknow*, trans. Khushwant Singh and M. A. Husaini (Bombay, 1961).

7. *Soz-e-Vatan*, pp. 1–14.

8. Suhrawardy, p. 15. Manmathnath Gupta claims this book was translated from a Hatim Tai story by Haidar Bakhsh Haidari, another of the men associated with John Gilchrist at Fort William College (*Premchand: Vyakti aur Sahityakar*, p. 76).

9. Suhrawardy, pp. 18–19.

10. On the question of Persian influence on Urdu, Muhammad Sadiq, writing of the rise of Urdu poetry in North India, claims that though it gained an impulse from re-

chand's early stories as "Sok-ka Puraskar" ("Reward for Distress," 1907–9), "Nasihato-ka Daftar" ("Office of Counsel"), "Triya Caritra" ("Female Wiles," 1913), "Manavan" ("Reconciliation"), "Amrt" ("Immortal," pre-1914), "Gairat-ki Katar" ("The Dagger of Modesty," 1915), "Dhokha" ("Deception," 1916), and "Anath Larki" ("Fatherless Girl," 1914). Almost all are romantic love stories of one kind or another in which, the course of love not being smooth, various and unusual devices are used to bring the lovers, or husbands and wives, together again. Some of these stories have excerpts of realism in their settings, but all of them contain events that are not near and familiar to everyday Indian life. In the eight stories listed above, the plots of five have been assisted by placing one important character in a disguise in which he is unrecognizable.[11] Two stories contain people who, while alive, report themselves dead and thereby complicate the plot.[12] One young married man, mourning the death of a girl he secretly loved, is comforted by a young Sikh who sings beautiful, sad songs, and who later nurses the hero back to health from a case of smallpox contracted at Simla. It turns out that the young Sikh is really the young man's scorned wife in disguise.[13]

In "Nasihato ka Daftar" ("Office of Counsel"), a perfumed love letter comes to a middle-aged, overly frugal lawyer, inviting him to

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action against the supremacy of Persian, yet "the movement in favor of Urdu was sponsored chiefly by Indian Muslim scholars steeped in Persian culture, language and literature, and therefore, odd as it may seem, this advocacy of Urdu took the form of large importations from Persian into the Urdu language and Urdu poetry" (*A History of Urdu Literature* [London, 1964], pp. 73–74). The nature of these Persian influences is difficult to isolate. S. N. Ganesan writes: "In nineteenth century Hindi literature the tendencies toward surprising events and magic seem to be largely connected with Persian-Arabic stories. In Premchand's opinion 'Devkinandan Khatri probably took his basic source for *Chandrakanta* and *Chandrakanta Santati* from *Tilismi Hosruba*' " (*Hindi Upanyas Sahitya-ka Adhyayan* [Dilli, 1962], p. 43).

Of Sarsar's women, Sadiq says, "they have no soul of seriousness. They are gay, flippant, sentimental, even theatrical—true to the tradition of the courtesan" (p. 333). He speaks of the well-worn themes of early modern Persian poetry as being of amatory escapades, reflections on the vanity and futility of life, and a few mystical ideas treated in a conventional manner; he says the poetry cultivated delicacy and refinement instead of strength. In the lyric poetry, love is full of grief, pathetic yearnings, and disappointments.

11. Premchand, *Gupta Dhan* (2 vols.; Ilahabad, 1962), I, 25–34, 84–92, 102–17, 125–34. See also Premchand, *Mansarovar*, VI, 193–201.

12. *Gupta Dhan*, pp. 118–24, 182–89. 13. *Ibid.*, pp. 25–34.

meet a lady dressed in green under the trees at a certain house on a certain night. For the first time in his life, the lawyer spends money lavishly to outfit himself for the meeting, and when the time comes he pours out his heart in passionate words: "your love has raised a tempest among the desires of my heart. Now this heart is sacrificed to you and this life is laid at your feet." Then, in his eagerness, he removes the lady's veil and sees the smiling face of his own attractive wife, Hemvati, whom he had often chided for spending money injudiciously.[14]

Many of these stories illustrate the early technical flaws of Premchand's writing which, however, had been amply anticipated in the works not only of his Urdu precursors but also in the writings of the nineteenth-century English writers whose work he had read in Urdu translation. David Cecil, discussing some faults of Charles Dickens, writes: "He cannot construct, for one thing. His books have no organic unity; they are full of detachable episodes, characters who serve no purpose in furthering the plot. Nor are these the least interesting characters."[15] This may be said of the early Premchand.

One of the stories, "Manavan" ("Reconciliation"), for example, describes the quarrel between a husband and wife over the fact that the husband stayed away at a conference three days longer than he had promised. The husband tries to humor the wife in a number of ways, one of which is to appear suddenly before her disguised in the *burqa*[16] of a Muslim lady neighbor. To give adequate background for this, Premchand goes into a long detour of details about a Muslim family who lives next door. The head of the family, an old man, has contracted a second marriage with a young woman. This is the woman whom the hero tries to impersonate. But in this "detachable episode," Premchand does much more than give background for the husband's impersonation of the Muslim lady. He goes into a long description of the old Muslim who has married a young wife, a description which in no way serves the purposes of the main story, but this character, too, is by no means one of the "least interesting characters." The old

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 84–92.

15. David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists* (London, 1964), p. 29.

16. A hooded cloth covering worn by a Muslim woman, having in it two holes for the eyes.

Muslim's friends have called him a fool for marrying a young woman at his age, and he answers:

> "Why? Does death have any enmity for old men? Poor old men don't cause him any difficulty. If we go into a garden we don't pluck old withered flowers; our eyes fall on the young and fresh, the bursting and blossoming flowers. Sometimes we even pluck little buds to make garlands. This is the way with death. Do you think *Yamraj*[17] doesn't have this much sense? I can make a bet with you that young people and babies die more than old people. Look at me: three of my young brothers, five sisters, the husbands of my sisters, three elder brothers' wives, four sons, five daughters, several nephews—the whole lot have left the world right in front of my eyes. Death swallowed them all up, but he hasn't moved one hair of my head out of place. It is false, absolutely false that old men die quickly. And the basic fact is that an old man needs a young woman. My daughters-in-law should not and cannot come out in my presence, my elder brothers' wives are themselves too old, my younger brother's wife is not even allowed to see my shadow, my sisters are in their own homes, my sons can't even talk straight. So, I'm left. An old man. If I get sick who'll move a hand for me? Who'll bring me a lota of water? Who will look out for me, how will I divert my mind? Well? Should I commit suicide? Or go drown myself?"[18]

While these early stories may be said to reflect in various ways Persian influence gleaned through his Urdu novelist forebears, the romantic and idealistic qualities cannot be exclusively attributed to these sources. The pre-Premchand Hindi novels, while including some works with social themes, also were predominantly concerned with magic, adventure, and love.[19]

> A few historical novels were also written, but most of them are historical in name, for they do not contain the essential elements of the historical novels. The characters are, no doubt, historical

17. The god who presides over the ancestors and rules the spirits of the dead. Note that an old Muslim uses this word though it has its source in the Hindu Rigveda.

18. *Gupta Dhan*, I, 130.

19. Some of this, however, may have been due to Persian through Urdu literature. See above, p. 56–57, n. 10.

> personages but otherwise these should be regarded as romantic novels or novels of magic and mystery. . . . The romantic novels. . . contain sensuous portrayal of the Indian idealistic love and of the adventurous love so characteristic of Persian fiction.[20]

In the years following his thirteenth birthday, Premchand read, in addition to the Urdu writers, such diverse authors as the Hindi writer Devkinandan Khatri and the Bengali writers Bankim Chandra Chatterji and Rabindranath Tagore, as well as Urdu translations of various English writers.[21] "In two or three years," he wrote of this time, "I must have read hundreds of novels."[22]

The sum total of these influences seem adequately to explain the presence in Premchand's early writing of a type of romanticism which was not characteristic of his work as a whole. This being his earliest writing, it could also understandably appear imitative. On March 4, 1914, in the middle of the period under review, Premchand wrote to Dayanarain Nigam: "Up to now I am not satisfied as to what style I should adopt. Sometimes I copy Bankim, sometimes Azad.[23] Lately I have finished reading Tolstoi's stories. Since then my tendency is toward something like his work. What else is this but my own weakness."[24]

While in this period of early experimentation, Premchand had not earned the title of "Storyteller of the Indian Independence Movement" because little that he wrote specifically reflects the nationalist activities in India. Yet the feelings of patriotism and the desire for independence are evident in some of the stories, though they are set in Persia, Italy, the Himalayas, or medieval India, all of which were remote from early twentieth-century Banaras or Lucknow or partitioned Bengal. The patriotism, however, even during this early period gradually moved from the romantic toward the actual.[25] In the earliest pa-

20. Savitri Sinha, "Hindi," in *Indian Literature: Short Critical Surveys of Twelve Major Indian Languages and Literatures* (Agra, Lakshmi Narayan Agarwal, 1959), p. 660.

21. Premchand, *Kafan*, pp. 62–63. 22. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

23. Perhaps Sayyid Muhammad Azad, who wrote sketches that ridiculed the new westernization of Indians. See Suhrawardy, pp. 208–10.

24. *Citthi Patri*, I, 29.

25. There appears a strange hiatus in the Urdu novel at this time. Manmathnath Gupta says the Urdu novel had been much more important than the Hindi novel at the end of the nineteenth century, but that by 1910 it had dropped behind (p. 83).

triotic stories the chief concern was to portray characters who laid down their lives for their country, any country, and the reader still senses the Persian-Urdu influences. In the next stage, the stories move closer to realism only in that they find in the specifically Indian history of the Rajputs great bravery, the ability to happily lay down one's life for country, and an example to refute the insinuation that Indians were effete and cowardly. By the end of the period Premchand's stories had moved into the villages and cities of India and had begun to pick up the more subtle patriotism of social reform and practicing idealism, and gave a more discriminating description of the qualities necessary for a country to be fit for independence.

Premchand's early patriotism also strove to contrast the lofty ideals generated by Indian culture with the Western values brought into India by the British. There is no doubt that Premchand accepted much that was English or Western. He learned English, he read voluminously in English, he used a printing press, he traveled in trains, he wrote short stories and discussed their qualities in Western terms. In spite of himself he was caught in an atmosphere that had admitted and absorbed much Western custom and technology. Nevertheless, there remained within him a stubborn strain of resistance to social and cultural imports from the West. His writings are full of satirical remarks about people who copy English ways. He could be international where universal moral truths were concerned, but he desired that the social and economic by-products of Western life, if some must come in, should be filtered through an Indian judgment. This desire when it showed in his very early stories was marred by sentimentality and by exaggeration.

"Yahi Mera Vatan Hai" ("This is My Country," 1907–9), the story of a very old man who returns to India after an absence of sixty

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Muhammad Sadiq says that between 1880 and 1917 only Sharar wrote anything of consequence in Urdu (p. 345). Manmathnath Gupta reasons that Urdu had now become the language of a middle-class Muslim minority, and that the orthodoxy and backwardness of Muslims prevented them from thinking freely, and therefore they could not write novels of wide acceptability (p. 83). To this might be added the suggestion that the rising tide of nationalism in India, in which the Muslims seemed uncertain of their place, had outdated the themes that had interested the chief Urdu writers, and with their pan-Islamic and Khilafat preoccupations they withdrew for a time from the mainstream of national thought.

years, is regarded by almost all Indian critics as a weak story. It is brought in here only to illustrate Premchand's early reaction to Western dominance and his early challenge that there were things in the Indian way of life superior to those imported from abroad.

When the old man lands in Bombay he is confronted with unpleasant evidence of British products everywhere: in tramcars and shops, cheroots, rubber tires, coats, and pants. Upon arrival at his village he finds the old place where he had bathed his horse and gone swimming is now surrounded by a barbed wire fence, while two or three Englishmen carrying rifles guard it from the verandah of a bungalow. In the village he passes hundreds of people all talking about law courts and collectors and police stations. Their faces are lifeless and full of worry. There are no young men of strength and vigor as in his youth; the wrestling ground he had helped make now houses a tumble-down school full of starving, ragged children. Near the great banyan tree where he had played and gossiped now stands a police station, and under the tree sit red-turbanned police. The open square where people had sat in the evenings, and where *panchayats*[26] had been held, is gone. The cow-protection yard[27] next to it has disappeared. Now there is an inoculation station there and a post office. The delightful sugarcane-pressing place has been replaced by a hemp-folding machine. Again and again the old man cries to himself: "This may be England, America, anywhere, but it is not my native India." He tries to get a place to sleep for the night but is told repeatedly to move on. The old *dharmshala*[28] for strangers has become a center of drinking, gambling, and crime. When he has almost given up to despair, he suddenly hears women singing. A large procession of women and men carrying their *lotas*[29] passes by. They are on their way to bathe in the Ganges. The women sing an old sacred song, while others call out the sacred names: "Siva-Siva, Har-Har, Gange-Gange, Narayan-Narayan."

26. An assembly of men, traditionally five, which decides disputes among villagers.

27. The placing of old cows in a special place where they may live out their lives peacefully reflects the reverence for the cow in Hindu culture. For a full discussion of the evolution of the sacred position in which the cow is held in India, see W. Norman Brown, "The Sanctity of the Cow in Hinduism," *Journal of the Madras University*, XXVIII (Jan. 1957). Also see Gandhi's description of the cow as a "poem of pity."

28. A rest house.

29. Brass or copper water vessels.

The old man joins them. They come to the Ganges "to dip in whose waves and to die on whose bosom all Hindus considered the highest blessing." Here as he watches people bathing, praying, and making sacrifices, his heart beats fast. "Now," he exclaims at last, "I am in my country. This is my beloved land, these people are my brothers, Ganges is my Mother." He erects a small hut for himself on the beach and remains there, repeating the name of God and daily taking his Ganges bath.[30]

In another of these early stories, called in its Hindi translation "Sap" ("The Curse"), Premchand spells out his pride in one of the superior qualities he finds in Indian culture. A German tourist, telling the story of an Indian woman's great faithfulness to her husband even after the husband had been put under a curse and turned into a lion, says:

> Reader, the astonishment I felt on hearing that beautiful woman's story is indescribable. It is a shame that Western men without imagination and faith should raise a hand against a race that could produce such an extraordinary woman. In the whole of Europe there would not be one woman to compare with her. We have always regarded the relationship of men and women as a worldly thing. Its spiritual aspect has been miles from our thoughts. For this reason, in our countries after centuries of progress, we cannot find such a shining and unworldly example of fidelity. And unfortunately our civilization has taken such a course that even in the distant future there cannot be the possibility of producing such women. If Germany is proud of its armies, France of its pleasures, and England of its business, India is proud of its women's faithfulness. Isn't it a matter of shame to the inhabitants of Europe, that such high-level authors as Homer, Vergil, Dante, Goethe, Shakespeare, Hugo, were not able to create a single Sita or Savitri. In reality Western culture is deprived of such ideals.[31]

The story "Yahi Mera Vatan Hai," about the old man who returns to India after sixty years, is interesting for yet another reason. It was one of a collection of five stories published in 1909 by Zamana Press,

30. *Soz-e-Vatan*, pp. 40–49.

31. *Mansarovar*, VI, 81–82.

Kanpur, under the title *Soz-e-Vatan*. Premchand wrote this book under the pseudonym Nawab Rai, a name by which his uncle had called him. A subdeputy inspector of schools at the time of its publication, Premchand was on tour when a message arrived from the Collector of Hamirpur District calling him for an immediate interview. After traveling day and night by bullock cart to reach the Collector, he was taken into the office and shown a copy of the book:

> "Did you write this book?" asked the Collector. I admitted it. The Sahab asked me the meaning of each story, and finally getting angry said: "Your stories are filled with sedition. Be thankful you are under British rule. If this had been Mugal Raj you'd have had both your hands cut off. . . ." The decision finally was that I must yield to the Government all copies of *Soz-e-Vatan* and without the permission of the Sahab I could write nothing more.[32]

Thus, most of the copies of this collection were burned. Fortunately a few copies remained in the *Zamana* Office and were sold off slowly,[33] and Nawab Rai shortly after was reincarnated as Premchand.

In *Soz-e-Vatan*, only four of the five stories touched upon subject matter that a sensitive government might conceive of as subversive. The first short story he ever wrote, "Dunya-ka Sab-se Anmol Ratna" ("The Most Valuable Gem in the World," 1907), is one of them. The theme of this story is patriotism. The setting is reminiscent of Persia, and the hero, commissioned by his beloved to find for her the most precious gem in the world if he wishes to win her love, wanders into India and there, on a battlefield, catches in his hand the last drop of blood of a Rajput who wants to die rather than live in a conquered land. The drop of blood is the most valuable gem in the world. Of the other stories, one is notable only because it is the story of the love of an Italian girl for Mazzini, the Italian patriot.[34] Mazzini will not let himself love the girl, because he must devote himself heart and soul to the liberation of his country. This sentimental, meandering—it moves from London to Italy to Switzerland—story is interesting because it is a reflection in Premchand of that great interest shown in

32. *Kafan*, p. 64.
33. Dayanarain Nigam, "Premchand-ki Bate," in Sacirani Gurtu, ed., *Premchand aur Gorki* (Dilli, 1955), p. 17.
34. *Soz-e-Vatan*, pp. 66–82.

India for the Italian revolution, from which the names of Mazzini and Garibaldi became known to every Indian.

These were romantic stories of patriotism and bravery, and following them, in the years from about 1910 to 1915 while he was serving most of the time in the Bundelkhand region in Hamirpur District, he began writing a series of stories about the Bundelkhand Rajputs and their bravery. It has been suggested earlier that Premchand had ample reason for trying to teach his nationalism under the disguise of Rajput history[35] instead of describing the current scene. The reason, however, was not that he lived in the clouds and did not know what was going on.

A few random illustrations from his life will show how involved he was in the political events and moods of this period. He had begun to write the popular monthly column "Raftar-i-Zamana" ("The March of Time") for *Zamana* magazine, dealing with all manner of current problems. He had attended with Dayanarain Nigam an annual meeting of the Indian National Congress, where he had shown himself stubbornly for Tilak against Gokhale. In 1908 there was much extremist activity, particularly in Bengal where two young Bengalis, Prafulla Chaki and Khudiram Bose, threw a bomb at an English police officer in Muzaffarpur, missed him, and killed two English ladies, Miss and Mrs. Kennedy. Chaki committed suicide on the spot but Khudiram Bose escaped. He was captured next day and hanged. Because Khudiram Bose was only fifteen years old, the whole country was angered. According to Amrtrai,

> when on August 11, 1908, Khudiram was hanged, thoughts of agreement departed from his [Premchand's] heart, any kind of agreement. After that day between him and the government was the body of Khudiram. . . . A very deep hurt filled his heart, but also there was not a little pride, and Munshiji who never had hung pictures of anyone in his house, went out and brought back a picture of Khudiram and hung it with great love in his room.[36]

These are small glimpses into the life of Premchand up to 1910, which reveal that he was not one who sat aloof from the exciting events of his times. The fact that he did not bring these current affairs

35. See above, p. 15.

36. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 98.

into his fiction at this time should also be considered in the light of his literary development. As has been noted earlier, Premchand had not yet found himself as a writer. When he read Bankim Chandra Chatterji, he copied his style; when he read Tolstoi, he copied that. It had not occurred to him that he knew the villages of India better than anything else. The novice might find romance in China but nothing worth writing about in his own street. He had not discovered his special quality. The political dependence of India had made him feel the urges of patriotism: his mind latched on quickly to any example around the world that showed someone fighting for liberty, and within India his mind searched for those historic incidents which taught the same lesson. He wrote about a Mazzini who would not let himself love an "irreproachably lovely girl. It would be difficult also to find her equal in inner beauty,"[37] because such a love might take away the singleness of his love for his country. In one way these were the dreams of youth, an outline of ideals, awaiting the filling in of more sober realities.

The choice of Rajput history for a series of stories from about 1910 to 1915 is also natural. Premchand as a subdeputy inspector of schools, knew the countryside which is dotted with the crumbling forts of the Bundela Rajputs, and where legends of their courage were still sung. As a literary weapon of nationalism, these Rajputs offered a picture of Indians who were strong, fighting men, quick to lay down their lives and quick to avenge their honor. The women would have nothing to do with husbands who came back alive from a defeat without their swords, but the widows unquestioningly performed *sati*[38] on their husbands' pyres. In a story called "Rani Sarandha" (1910), the Rani and her husband are allied with Dara Shikoh, son of Shah Jahan. The two other sons of the emperor, Murad and Muhiuddin, are coming up from the south to claim the throne. As they reach the Chambal River they find the Emperor's army waiting for them. In their difficulty they send a message to Rani Sarandha's husband: "For the sake of God help our sinking ship to cross."

> The Rani's husband came and asked the Rani what to do.
> She said: "We'll have to help them."

37. *Soz-e-Vatan*, p. 71.
38. Immolation of the wife on her husband's funeral pyre.

"If we help them," said her husband, "we'll make an enemy of Dara Shikoh."

"That's true, but we are obliged by custom to help those with hands outstretched." Then she continued: "My dear, I know well this is a difficult path to take. And now we will have to shed the blood of our soldiers like water; but we will shed our own blood, too, and we'll make red the waves of the Chambal. But be sure that as long as the stream of this river flows, it will continue to sing the praise-song of our brave men. As long as there remains one who calls himself a Bundela, these drops of blood will shine on his forehead as a sacred saffron mark."[39]

Premchand's stories have been much gone over by critics. Of the historical stories there are two interpretations. The first says: Premchand

> knows where lies the heart of our culture, and knows in what direction flows the life-stream which emanates from it. . . . Where the West has placed before us many roads of knowledge and science, it has sucked the juice from our souls. We have slowly been moved from our ideals. . . . He wrote historical stories in order that through them he might place before us the specialities of Indian culture. . . . Soul above body, love above the sword, truth above untruth, and virtue above sin. . . . This is the seed [basic] advice of Indian culture.[40]

This author also lists qualities of Premchand's Rajputs: they were ready to give up their lives and always ready to protect those who asked for shelter. Wives were images of sacrifice; they would jump into the fire to protect their virtue, and would close their doors against a husband who fled the battle. Finally the author adds: "the spiritual force never bends before the physical force."[41]

In reply to the above, another critic says of Rani Sarandha that there seemed to be no rhyme nor reason in her bravery.

> It is debatable whether giving shelter to a refugee and thus without cause making an enemy of an old friend, is bravery or treachery.

39. *Mansarovar*, VI, 50.

40. Ramratan Bhatnagar, "Premchand-ki Kahaniya," in Madan, ed., *Premchand: Cintan aur Kala* (Banaras, n.d.), pp. 100–101.

41. *Ibid.*

> . . . To fight without reason, then without reason to sacrifice your life, all these specialties of feudalism can be seen in this story. . . . Sarandha's bravery is unhealthy. This bravery cannot be compared with true bravery, but with the wild hand-throwings of the insane.[42]

The same Rani Sarandha sacrificed her lands, her husband's kingdom, and eventually her husband's and her own life for a horse. She had captured this horse on a battlefield; later someone else had stolen it from her son, and she had sought revenge.

In another story, a young Rajput girl is commanded by her dying father to avenge the death of their cow which had been killed by a young Rajput. The girl wanders the earth till she finds the Rajput. The Rajput turns out to be a good and brave man, husband of a lady who had befriended the young, vengeance-seeking Rajput girl. But the girl's heart will not be softened. She goes to the Rajput's best friend and asks him if he will kill to protect her honor. The best friend swears he will avenge her, and though he finds later that this means he must kill his life-long friend, he does not hesitate to do his duty. The dead Rajput's wife gives up her life on her husband's funeral pyre, but before dying she curses her husband's former friend. A few months later the friend is killed, and his wife, too, ascends his funeral pyre.[43]

Thus these stories go, expending huge emotions over what the above critic would call trivial incidents: a hero quietly accepting a *pān*[44] that he knows is poisoned in order to protect a virtuous lady whose husband is jealous of him[45]; a girl, kidnaped on the day of her marriage, hating her kidnaper and not letting him come near her, still feels that her Rajput duty calls for her to remain where she is, however illegal the marriage might be, that even this forced marriage is some kind of a sacrament for which she is prepared to give her life.[46]

These stories performed a catharsis in Premchand. Thereafter, he returned seldom to historical subjects, and then, in his best historical story, "Shatranj-ke Khilari" ("The Chess Players," 1924), only to ridi-

42. Manmathnath Gupta, p. 377. 43. *Mansarovar*, IX, 127–38.

44. A leaf folded around bits of betelnut, catechu, and other ingredients.

45. *Ibid.*, IX, 12–26.

46. *Ibid.*, IX, 98–114. Eight types of marriage are enumerated in Manu's Law Book, of which the seventh, *raksasa*, takes place "by the violent seizure or rape of a girl after the defeat or destruction of her relatives." A raksasa was a demon. See Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1960), p. 871.

cule the sham values of nawabs, two of whom in this story watch without a tremor of conscience as the English army overruns their land. Their only passion is for playing chess, and they watch with complete indifference while their king is marched off into captivity.[47]

In 1910 Premchand wrote "Bare Ghar-ki Beti" ("The Daughter of a Highly Placed Family"), which told of a joint family in contemporary India; and with this story may be said to begin the literature which has come to be associated most closely with the name of Premchand. It was a purposive literature whose aims became closely concerned with current and specific problems, and gave rise to the critical habit (started by Premchand himself) of classifying him as an idealistic realist.

The idealism that in his romantic and historical stories had had to seek outlet on battlefields and strange countries, that sought situations where men and women could give their lives for honor or country, now was brought into modern Indian settings where characters were faced with twentieth-century problems. Insofar as the settings and characters are true to life, these stories may be called realistic. However, as Premchand was a writer with a purpose and contrived to teach a lesson in each story, the nature of his development as a writer may best be exposed by a discussion of the fictional solutions he used and the ideals he sought to establish.

Earlier in this study various possible influences on Premchand were discussed at some length.[48] The years of the early stories were spent largely in the districts of eastern Uttar Pradesh, where a combination of influences, predominantly Hindu in character, appeared temporarily to restrict his perspectives. Amrtrai, commenting on this period, writes:

> In 1912 *Jalva-e-Isar* [an early novel] came out when Munshiji was in Hamirpur and was an active member of the Arya Samaj. They [the Arya Samajists], too, were striking the waves of nationalism, but it was a Hindu nationalism. Probably he [Premchand] had advanced only to these limits by this time. Many people to the end did not cross these limits. Munshiji crossed them, and crossed them well, but later. . . .[49]

47. *Mansarovar*, III, 266–77.
48. See above, Chap. One.
49. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 153.

Later, when Premchand moved to Gorakhpur in 1916, the national mood had altered. Hindu-Muslim unity had been dramatically illustrated by the Lucknow Pact of 1916 through which the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress came to agreement, among other things, on the question of separate electorates. The teachings of Tolstoi and the appearance of Gandhi with his first demonstration of Satyagraha at Champaran, the expectations of the coming end of World War I, and the new hopes for major steps toward Independence; in the presence of all these factors Premchand appeared to shake off any traces of provincialism and to move into the mainstream of nationalism. Influences are difficult to trace and isolated strands of experience appear clumsy tools in the assessment of a man's mind, but the combination of events and forces and thoughts, undoubtedly including those of his own upbringing, contributed to a new balance or to a re-balance of his attitudes after 1916.

The changes which occurred in Premchand's intellectual outlook between the Hamirpur-Basti period (1909–16) and the Gorakhpur period (1916–21) are reflected in his short stories, though not with corresponding chronological certainty. It may be noted that in the first half of the decade the romantic and unusual after-effects of his Urdu and Hindi predecessors appear more frequently than later.[50] From 1911 to 1915 a type of Hindu nationalism appears to have suggested a story like "Khun Safed" ("White Blood," 1914),[51] while in the latter half-decade (1916 to 1921) the influence of Tolstoi may be surmised from a series of stories stressing the force of love and non-violence, written within a limited period of time from 1916 when it is known that Premchand had translated and adapted twenty-three of Tolstoi's stories into Hindi.[52]

In essence it might be said of Premchand's development in idealistic realism that the ideals which had always appeared in his work became by the end of the period (1921) no longer instinctive but conscious. Love, mercy, courage, and honesty, long his ideals, became programmed. Haphazard humaneness was put under discipline. Perhaps it was influences such as Tolstoi and socialism and the early Gandhi,

50. Premchand, *Gupta Dhan*, I, 149–57, 167–74; see also *Mansarovar*, VIII, 39–46.
51. *Mansarovar*, VIII, 515. For background to the story, see below, p. 73.
52. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, pp. 165–66.

with their efforts to institutionalize sentiments like "Love thy Brother as thyself" and "All men are brothers," that brought a new consistency to his outlook and prevented him from falling back into an uncritical idealization of things Hindu and to concentrate exclusively on matters that concerned the unity of the nation.

In the earlier stories from 1909 to 1916, an exclusively Hindu world is depicted, whereas in the later period (1916–21) tradition is accepted in the light of social philosophies which broaden the themes to include Hindu-Muslim amity and more open ridicule and satire of Hindu social and religious practices. However, Premchand never gave up his defense of time-honored traditions and institutions so long as they could conform to the ideals of his growing social consciousness.

In all the stories about justice throughout the period, Premchand seeks to have justice served by trusted, traditional means. In 1911 he wrote a story "Garib-ki Hay" ("The Cry of the Poor"),[53] in which justice is sought by the time-honored method of dharna.[54] An old brahman woman who believed she had been cheated of a large balance of the reward money she had been given on her husband's death went mad in her anger and grief. For days and weeks she sat and fasted in front of the door of the munshi who had cheated her. Finally one morning she was found dead on the munshi's doorstep.

> There was more uproar over such an unusual happening than seemed possible in so small a village. . . . Now even the chamars would not touch him or take water from his hands. If in any home a cow dies while tied to a stake, that man has to wander around for months asking for alms. No barber would shave him, no kahar would bring him water, no one would touch him. This is the penance for cow-killing! The punishment for killing a brahman is far worse. It brings a very great stigma. Muga [the mad woman] knew this and that is why she came and died by this doorstep. She knew that what she couldn't do while alive, she could accomplish a fair amount of by dying. When cow dung is burned and becomes ashes, the sadhus and saints put the ashes on their foreheads.[55]

53. *Mansarovar*, VIII, 16–28.

54. The custom of sitting or standing in front of the house of one who has not paid a debt, or has not acceded to a request or a claim.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

In "Panc Parmeswar" ("The God in the Panchayat," 1916), a story which his biographer claims was one of those written under the influence of Tolstoi,[56] justice is achieved by the long-existent method of the panchayat. Two old friends, a Muslim and a Hindu, become enemies when one is made to serve on a panchayat that is trying the other. The Hindu on the panchayat finds his friend guilty. The Muslim, greatly angered, seeks revenge, and at last gets his chance to serve on a panchayat that is to try his former Hindu friend. But he finds that sitting on a panchayat is like sitting on the highest seat of "duty and justice." The Hindu friend is innocent, and the Muslim is driven by the charismatic aura of his position on the panchayat to declare him so.[57] Thus, the panchayat is justified as a venerable but effective institution, and in this later part of the decade it is updated to command the respect of both Muslims and Hindus as brother Indians. Its power could be used plausibly in the story to cause a man's feelings to change from hate to love and to promote national unity.

Premchand, in upholding the Indian way of life, did not in this period, or any other, remain on the defensive. While praising traditional methods of law he also stressed the injustice of Western courts. In two stories, "Iswariya Nyaya" ("Divine Justice," 1917)[58] and "Dharm Sakat" ("Torment of Moral Duty," 1913),[59] he describes two Western-type court cases. In one case the court declares innocent a man who is guilty, and in the other calls the guilty man innocent. The woman plaintiff in the first case, who knows the defendant is guilty though declared innocent, cries out:

> "Those who dispense law nowadays are completely blind of eye. What the rest of the world knows, they don't see at all. No, they see only through the eyes of others. They are slaves of fresh paper. Law is supposed to be that which says milk is milk, water is water; it is not meant to be duped by its own paper, and to be entrapped in its own humbuggery. This is why imposters, deceivers, cheats, and villains keep getting bolder."[60]

As has been noted earlier, Premchand during the early years in the

56. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 166.
57. *Mansarovar*, VII, 152–64.
58. *Ibid.*, V, 248–68.
59. *Ibid.*, VIII, 39–40.
60. *Ibid.*, I, 266.

eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh appears to have come under the influence of the Arya Samaj. It is not known how long he was a dues-paying member, but on February 6, 1913, he wrote to Dayanarain Nigam: "Now remains the question of money. At this time I don't need cash. But there's a balance of Rs. 10 owed by me to the Hamirpur Arya Samaj. They've asked me for it time and again but my poverty hasn't permitted me to pay up. If you can afford it please send in my name a money order to the secretary of the Hamirpur Arya Samaj. I'll be grateful."[61] In connection with the Arya Samaj, too, Amrtrai quotes Maulvi Mahesh Prasad who recalled:

> In 1912 Premchand was a subdeputy inspector of schools in the Education Department of Hamirpur District. He was living in Mahoba. I don't recall whether it was May or June that I had to go to Mahoba as a pracarak [preacher] of the Arya Samaj. . . . Through him I gained much information about those efforts of the Christians which were being carried on not only in Mahoba but all over Hamirpur District. He told me that because of our social evils the result was that in Mahoba and other parts of Bandelkhand many Hindu boys and girls were going into the homes of Christians.[62]

The question of Hindu children being converted to Christianity irritated Premchand. In July, 1914, he wrote a short story "Khun Safed" ("White Blood"), which illustrates that although he could criticize Hindu social failures at that time, he did not try to solve his story problems by application of any of his later prescriptions. "Khun Safed" tells the story of a young boy who left his parents during a famine to follow a Christian missionary who passed that way with plenty of foodstuffs. The child stayed away many years and then one day came home. His parents were overjoyed. But the whole village was in attendance and one old man said: "So son, you've stayed all these years among *padris*.[63] They must have made you into a padri, too." The boy admitted it but said he would undergo any penance they named. But the old man said: "This has never happened in the Hindu religion. If your parents wish they can keep you in their home, but the baradari[64] will have no part of

61. *Citthi Patri*, I, 17.
62. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 49.
63. Christian cleric. Here referring to Christians in general.
64. Caste fellows.

this." The decision was that he could stay but he could not eat from the same dishes and had other restrictions placed on him. The boy refused. "It is not possible for me to stay in this house and have to eat separately and sit alone." As he went away his father from a tortured heart thought: "Alas, my beloved son, you are parted from me! Such a worthy and promising boy gone from us and only because now our blood has turned white."[65]

The month before, Premchand had written another story, "Anath Larki" ("Fatherless Girl"), which in contrast showed the good results that occurred when Hindus looked after their orphans. A little girl (who had a mother but no father) was provided for by a humane *seth*[66] of Bombay. The little girl grew up to be beautiful:

> In her charm was an attractive seriousness, in her speech the lure of music, and like music was her spiritual essence . . . in her eyes modesty and shyness, in her thoughts purity. She was young but free from vanity, artificiality, and instability. . . . She was gradually making her way to the heights of excellence proper to women.[67]

In the stories of this period Premchand sought to uphold traditional institutions. It has been suggested that in the early phase he depicted a Hindu world that held within it its own methods of rehabilitation, whereas in the later period outside influences such as Tolstoi's were consciously borrowed and applied in a quest for social and economic solutions. The Hindu patriotism of the one type of story as contrasted with the more experimental and open nature of the later ones may perhaps be illustrated by two stories regarding zamindars. In both stories the assumption is clear that zamindars are to stay, not to be abolished.

In "Ghamand-ka Putla" ("The Plaything of Pride," 1916),[68] Kumar Sajjan Singh is a zamindar whose lands lie along the banks of the Sarju River. When government officials come to his area, he refuses to let them live off the land free. He says he is no man's slave. That year "during the rains the river rose so quickly that thousands of villages

65. *Mansarovar*, VIII, 5–15.

66. A great merchant, banker, millionaire, capitalist, chief of a corporation; title of respect given to bankers, merchants, etc.

67. *Gupta Dhan*, I, 170.

68. *Ibid.*, pp. 207–14.

were destroyed, huge trees flowed past like straws. Babies and women sleeping in rope-cots, cows and oxen tied to stakes, were all swallowed up in its roaring waves. Boats moved about the fields."[69] There are cries to the government and to charitable organizations for help, but Kumar Singh, whose lands have been most severely affected, refuses to ask for help. Nevertheless, he demands no taxes from any of his farmers that year. In a flashback, the author writes that once when a famous Indian poet came to town, an address of welcome was read to him which said, in part: "O leader of the nation. O our spiritual leader. We welcome you with love, we bow at your feet." These words so annoyed Kumar Singh that he walked out of the meeting. Later, he said, he respected the poet for his poetry, his nationalism, but "I am not prepared to recognize him as my spiritual leader nor bow down to him."[70] The last scene of the story shows the high bank of a river where under a tree burns the small fire of a *sadhu*.[71] Kneeling before the sadhu is a man kissing the holy man's feet. "The sadhu had both his hands on the man's head. It was as if desire was seeking an asylum of firmness and peace, an innocent child coming to the laps of its mother and father."[72] This man bowing down was Kumar Sajjan Singh, the proud zamindar. In this zamindar one sees a pious Hindu, a man who stands on his own feet and who bows his head to no one but God, whose representative is a Hindu sadhu.

In contrast, the conscious application of a Tolstoian view of agriculture may be seen in "Updes" ("The Lesson," 1917).[73] Pandit Sarma, the hero, is an absentee landlord who lives in Allahabad. He has not gone to see his lands since his father's death. In Allahabad he had been the secretary of the free library, had refused a job with the government, had been absorbed in service to his people, had written articles for newspapers, had been president of the students' association, vice-president of the social service league, and had taken great interest in farm problems, underlining with red pencil any interesting thing he read.

Then the plague comes to Allahabad. All the rich people flee. "Sarmaji also wanted to go. But he was still an officer of the social

69. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
71. Hindu holy man, mendicant, ideally one who is morally and personally pure, seeking a spiritual goal.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
73. *Mansarovar*, VIII, 279–300.

service league."[74] What should he do? He calls all the social service workers together and addresses them thus:

> "My friends, you are a light among our people. You are the hope of this bennumbed race. Today clouds of calamity overspread us. If under these circumstances I can't look to you, then to whom? . . . Show the people that you have the hearts of heroes, no matter how great the danger may be, do not waver. . . . Come, let's bind up our belts and enter the field of duty. There is no doubt this work is hard, the road rough; you'll have to give up your pleasures, your hockey and tennis, your Mill and Milton."

After this preparation, he adds:

> "My strongest desire was that I could share with you in this just work, but today I have had news that the disease has begun to spread in the villages. Thus I must entrust the work here into your firm, capable hands, while I go to the villages and help our country brothers to the limit of my ability."[75]

When he gets to his village, he spends most of his time reading Ruskin, books on agriculture in Holland, American commercial arts, and the German educational system, but he cannot help hearing noises and occasional cries of pain outside his window. He has told his *karinda*[76] never to demand free labor, so he assumes the villagers are just complaining because it is their habit. He begins to think that these villagers, whom he has always praised in his articles, are in reality ruffians and rascals. But slowly, unwillingly, he is forced to see how things really are. A neighbor zamindar who stays on his land most of the time and administers it himself has a village full of prosperous, contented people, while Pandit Sarma's own village is filthy. Through a frank police officer, he finds out how everyone preys on the villager and it turns his heart. He sees he has a duty to those who have fed him and enabled him to ride in horse carriages. From that day, Pandit Sarma determines to stay in the country and set an example by managing his lands himself.

The changes that may be detected in Premchand's writing after he

74. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
75. *Ibid.*, pp. 281–82.
76. A landlord's agent or representative.

came under such influences as Tolstoi may be thought of as an intellectual advance, or a widening of his social horizons, but it does not follow that these stories show an advance in artistic merit. The purposeful emphasis of a social or moral message is non-literary. It could justifiably be claimed in the above story that as long as Pandit Sarma remained a hypocrite he was an interesting character, but that when he began, without adequate warning to the reader, to do unto others as he wished to be done by, he lost some of his credibility. On the other hand, while Premchand's early realistic stories may indicate a narrow outlook, they may still claim greater literary authenticity. When Premchand wrote about Hindus in the village areas, he wrote about things familiar to him; when he made them change their hearts according to a social prescription he diminished their reality. The greatest influence upon Premchand was his birth and growth in an Indian village. When this ultimate influence entered his works, it gave them their "Premchand-ness" and their "Indian-ness." The social messages tacked on were literarily incidental and often detrimental.

Some of the stories discussed here have dealt with life in the village, but the stories influenced by Premchand's changing social views were often marred as literature when the village life was juxtaposed with the official world of government and the upper-class world of easy-living landlords. Describing these outside areas in his literature, Premchand found much corruption in them, but he did not know them intimately. His zamindars and government officials were expressions of single parasitic traits and were literary pawns used to express a lesson. The sufferings of the peasants under these outsiders were strongly and realistically expressed, but the necessity to convert an evil landlord, or portray an ideal landlord, or to have villagers suddenly see the error of their ways and pay up all their back taxes voluntarily—such things were unconvincing.

However, throughout his career Premchand wrote a series of village stories whose plots were entirely contained within the village itself, and whose actions were confined to inhabitants of the village. The life of the village was seen entirely from the viewpoint of people who lived there. The villains—petty zamindars, money-lenders, brahmans—lived there also. These stories are an exception to the above thesis that the change in Premchand's social views from Basti to Gorakhpur is re-

vealed in his tales. Throughout this type of village story, the change is in a greater awareness of technique, not in intellectual outlook. The theme of all of them is man's inhumanity to man, and the villagers are not helped by spiritually converted outsiders. The stories are all tragedies. It is within such stories that Premchand achieved his most consistent excellence. Toward the end of the period under discussion, he wrote the first of such stories, "Balidan" ("Sacrifice," 1918),[77] whose tradition can be seen carried on through the succeeding periods in such stories as "Muktimarg" ("The Path of Release," 1924),[78] "Puski Rat" ("A Night in the Winter Month of Pus," 1930),[79] "Thakurka Kua" ("The Landlord's Well," 1932),[80] "Kafan" ("The Shroud," 1936),[81] and several others.

"Balidan" describes a village family that had once owned a country sugar mill and had run several plows. The owner had been called Harakcandra then. But foreign sugar had wiped out his mill, and now he has only five *bighas*[82] of land. Now he is called only "Harku."[83] When he dies his son is allowed to keep the land at the same rent—eight rupees per bigha; but for this privilege he has to pay the local zamindar a hundred rupees as a gift. He cannot raise the money. He sells his oxen but that does not bring in enough, and without oxen what can he do? He thinks about the land he is losing: each part has a special name because of a special soil quality. When he pleads with the zamindar to reduce the hundred-rupee gift, the zamindar replies:

> You must think that I take this money for myself. And enjoy myself [play the flute of satisfaction]. But I know my commitments. At Christmas hundreds of rupees fly off in *dalis*.[84] If I don't give a dali to someone, I hear of it. I have to send outside for things to put in the dalis, things my own children pine for. In addition the

77. *Mansarovar*, VIII, 64–73. 78. *Ibid.*, III, 233–44.
79. *Gramya Jivan-ki Kahaniya* (Ilahabad, 1961), pp. 187–95.
80. *Ibid.*, pp. 167–71. 81. *Kafan*, pp. 5–14.
82. An area of land varying between one-third acre and one acre.
83. The "candra" which was dropped from his name is a word for the moon, and for that which glitters or shines; added to the name of a great man in the past it meant "the moon of," i.e., "the most excellent among." Here "Harakcandra" indicates the man had status; "Harku" made him a familiar and an equal of the villagers. See Monier-Williams, p. 386.
84. Trays full of gifts.

kanungo[85] comes, sometimes the *tahsildar*,[86] sometimes the deputy sahab's party [army]. They all become my guests. If I don't provide for them, I am made a fool of and make enemies [make thorns in their eyes] . . . . I long to get out of all this. But God made me for this that I should torment one person and take from him, and then that I should weep bitterly as I have to give to another. This is my field of work.[87]

The son, unable to pay the money, leaves his home one morning and never returns. But his ghost keeps coming back in the twilight hours. It sits on the boundaries of his fields and weeps. No one in the village dares to plow that land any more. This ghost is not the ghost of Premchand's Urdu or Hindi literary forebears: it is an extension here of a real grief. It expresses the despair of the villager who can find no help in the present world. And those other villagers who had seen the injustice done to him would understand that such a grief would bring forth a ghost.

Perhaps unfortunately, Premchand did not confine his writing to the village, but as his commitment to nationalism grew stronger his thoughts urged him to correct social and economic evils as he saw them. An independent India should not take over the machinery of the present government and put it into the hands of English-type Indians who would be as indifferent to the poor as were their predecessors. Thus, after the Russian Revolution when socialist theories had begun to stimulate Indian thought, it is not surprising that he should adapt these new ideas to his stories, as he had Tolstoi's, and find in them a variant for his teachings.

In 1920 he wrote "Pasu-se Manusya" ("From Beast to Man")[88] under this new influence. In this story a poor gardener steals fruit from his master's garden because the master does not pay him enough. The master catches him and dismisses him. By good fortune the gardener is hired by a progressive landlord who operates his gardens on a basis of equal sharing of profits with all his employees. One day the old master meets the new master, and the remainder of the story is the

85. An inspector of the patwari's records.
86. Revenue collector.
87. *Mansarovar*, VIII, 67.
88. *Ibid.*, VIII, 105–17.

expression of the new master's economic views. (The conversation between the two landlords is seven pages long.) The socialist landlord asks why those who provide the goods of life should be considered lower than "those who are only for pleasure and at most are an aid to the wealth-producing. If today all the lawyers were thrown out of the country, if the whole official world would disappear and all the brokers go to heaven, still the work of the world would go on and more easily so."[89]

A final measure of Premchand's emergence from uncritical protectiveness of an exclusively Hindu way of life may be seen in two stories of 1920 that turned to uninhibited ridicule of existing Hindu social and religious practices. "Brahm-ka Swag" ("Brahman Sham," 1920),[90] is concerned with the question of caste. A husband and wife are unhappy together, the wife because her husband has no regard for caste. The husband helps sponsor an inter-caste dinner, and the wife exclaims, "Why don't the skies fall at this sacrilege?" The husband finally explains carefully to her that God is the father of all. "In every bit of life lies the light of God. Only these worldly curtains have separated us one from the other. In reality we are all one . . . ."[91] This explanation lifts the scales from the wife's eyes, and she takes what he has said very seriously. She rubs her low-caste washerwoman's brow when she has a headache, invites low-caste women to come in and sit on the carpet with brahman girls, gives all the sweets purchased by her husband for a big party to a group of hungry beggars, and even lets them eat in the courtyard. This behavior proves too extreme for the husband. He is in favor of caste equality, but not to this extent.

Also in 1920 Premchand wrote "Manusya-ka Param Dharm" ("Man's Highest Duty"),[92] which was the first of several biting but funny stories about certain brahmans. Pandit Moteram on the occasion of Holi (a spring festival) mourns the fact that on this great day no devotees have come with gifts of sweets. He goes down to the ghats and, gathering an audience around him, he shouts:

"Brothers, you all know that when Brahma created this insub-

89. *Ibid.*, VIII, 114.
90. *Ibid.*, VIII, 133–41.
91. *Ibid.*, VIII, 135.
92. *Ibid.*, III, 205–9.

stantial world he made the brahman from his mouth. Nobody doubts this matter?"

Audience: "No maharaj, you are telling the absolute truth!"

Moteram: "So, the brahmans came from the Brahma's mouth, this is definite. Therefore, the mouth is man's best part. So to give happiness to the mouth is man's highest duty. Is this so or not?"[93]

He explains that there are several ways to give happiness to the mouth: sing the praises of the gods, worship only Brahma, associate with pious men; but the highest way is to feed the mouth of a brahman with the best-quality foods. And the best-quality foods are sweet things. Then he recites a list of specific sweets which he says would be fit for the enjoyment of God, through God's highest representatives on earth, the brahmans, such as the one who is standing before them.

During the period 1907 to 1920 Premchand made the decision that literature must serve a social purpose. Among his earliest stories are a number which, despite the elaborateness of their plots, the personality imbalances of the characters, and the exaggerations of event, appear to have been written for no reason other than to tell a story. Had he chosen this route to literature and developed along a line that considered the story as a thing in itself, to be scrutinized as an art where effects may be consciously achieved by the manipulation of a variety of techniques, it is possible that he would have before long produced stories that were not only artistically satisfying, but which in themselves discovered the means, not specifically perhaps, but indirectly and more persuasively, to express the moral lessons which he aimed for. Instead of the specific moral lesson he might have achieved the general moral atmosphere so much more suggestive and full of implications of the human struggle.

Perhaps the insistent presence of the problems in India at that time, added to the economic needs of the writer, produced his decision to do in literature what Gokhale, Tilak, Dayananda Saraswati, and Vivekananda were doing in the more direct fields of politics and social, economic, and religious reform. His development, therefore, is most clearly seen in extraliterary ways. Here it might be said that he moved

93. *Ibid.*, III, 206–7.

from patriotism in a romantic-historic setting to social reform in a realistic setting. He moved from idealistic generalizations to practical solutions. He moved from a tendency to accept and idealize specifically Hindu life to a strong awareness of the evils abiding in it; and from there he moved to a more responsible national outlook.

The choice of social purpose, however, demanded an audience to receive the lessons, and Premchand during this period was able to increase the number of his readers by using a language that was easily understood by both a Hindi- and an Urdu-speaking public. That he could, at one step, become the most prominent writer in both Hindi and Urdu rests on the fact that despite the purposive aims of his writing, the human world, albeit a surface scene, appeared in his work and was made lively and believable through his common-man's language.

Five STORYTELLER OF INDIAN REVOLT, 1920–1932

On February 8, 1921, on his tour of India to explain non-co-operation, Mahatma Gandhi came to Gorakhpur in northeastern Uttar Pradesh. Premchand, a schoolmaster in the Gorakhpur Government Normal School there since 1916, took his wife and two young children to the Gazi Mian Park to hear Gandhi speak. The effect of this speech was decisive upon Premchand. When he got home he told his wife: "If you agree, I'm going to resign my job."[1] His wife asked for some days to think about it. "We had a son and daughter," she recalls, "and were expecting another child. . . . Still in those days the fearful slaughter at Jalianwala Bagh had taken place, and it was natural that the flames were still in everyone's heart. It is probable they were in my heart, too. On the following day I found myself ready to endure all the troubles which would come from his giving up his job."[2] On February 16 Premchand turned in his resignation.[3]

There are few personal details to explain his choice of this moment to resign, but the political conditions prevailing in India early in 1921 were compelling enough to make it understandable. A mood of excitement spread over the countryside, and on the night Gandhi came to Gorakhpur "there was a crowd of no less than 200,000. From the villages, from the city, respectfully the people came."[4]

The mere mention of the events in India that followed World War I in 1918—Jalianwala Bagh, the Rowlatt Acts, the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms, the Treaty of Sevres, the Khilafat Movement,

1. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 248.
2. Sivrani Devi Premchand, pp. 48–49.
3. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 248.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

the Hunter Commission[5]—is enough to explain how Mahatma Gandhi who, before 1920 could still be spoken of as "a loyalist, still the disciple of his moderate master, Gokhale,"[6] could emerge by August 1, 1920, as the leader of a vast revolutionary movement of non-co-operation against the existing government of India. It was only six months later that Premchand resigned his government post.

Perhaps a more immediate cause for Premchand's desire to act was the fact that an important part of Gandhi's early program had dealt with government schools. On July 7, 1920, the Non-Cooperation Committee of the Indian National Congress had published in *Young India*, under the title "How and When to Act—Details of the First Stage," certain steps to be followed in initiating the non-co-operation movement. Article Four had stated: "Boycott of government schools by parents."[7] On August 11, 1920, Gandhi had written:

> But I contend that there is no sacrifice involved in emptying the schools. We must be specially unfit for Non-Cooperation if we are so helpless as to be unable to manage our own education to total independence of the government. . . . The very schoolmasters who are now conducting Government schools, if they are good enough to resign their office, could take charge of national schools and teach our children the things they need, and not make of the majority of them indifferent clerks."[8]

Certainly the non-co-operation movement with its constructive program of implementation brought drama into the streets where all could see. In the cities large bonfires were built to burn foreign cloth and give impetus to the weaving of Indian cloth. Huge meetings were held. Processions moved down crowded streets, and everywhere small

5. For a summary description of the Nationalist view of the events preceding and during the non-co-operation movement, 1920–22, see Rajendra Prasad, "A Brief Sketch of the Non-Cooperation Movement," in Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Young India, 1919–1922* (New York, 1924), pp. xxiii–lxii. A standard British description is L. F. Rushbrooke Williams, "The Indian National Congress in Its Various Phases," in *Political India, 1832–1932*, ed. John Cumming (London, 1932), pp. 58–62. See also Reginald Coupland, *India: A Restatement* (London, 1945), pp. 117–21. For British opinion generally favorable to the Indian Nationalist views, see D. Graham Pole, *India in Transition* (London, 1932), pp. 17–55.

6. P. D. Kaushik, *The Congress Ideology and Programme, 1920–47* (Bombay, 1964), p. 224.

7. Gandhi, *Young India*, p. 334.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 338.

groups, sometimes of three or four persons, one behind the other, went about chanting "Mahatma Gandhi-ji ke jai" ("victory to Gandhi"). Old words like *swaraj* (self-rule) and *ahimsa* (non-injury) reentered the daily vocabulary along with Gandhi's *satyagraha* (truth force) and made the people aware of a moral and spiritual rationale for what they were doing.

Premchand took no active part in picketing liquor shops or foreign cloth shops. He attempted to run a spinning wheel shop to make cloth, but that did not last long. The vast spectacle, however, drew him at once to propagate in fiction what Gandhi was doing in politics. It is from his stories of 1921–22 and 1930–32, written during the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements of those years, that earned for him the right to be called "Storyteller of the Independence Movement."[9]

The spectacle overpowered his subject matter and the purpose behind the national passion dictated his viewpoint. In essence he wrote to a prescription. Perhaps the chief literary importance of these stories lies in the detailed description of events. Premchand showed great ingenuity in finding new scenes, new characters, and new situations, but all the variety was usually assembled as a transparent disguise for the lessons he wished to teach. The lessons in this period, it is frequently said, were those of Gandhi. Premchand has been called a Gandhian, but this was not always true. Though Gandhi dominated the Indian scene and directed the national movement, many men followed his tactics without following the beliefs behind the tactics.[10] Premchand did not follow in all the details, but the influence of Gandhi is apparent in most of his story-endings, and he followed more than he deviated.

In "Dussahas" ("False Courage," 1922?) a prominent lawyer of Lucknow named Munshi Maikulal always spent his evenings with some cronies, drinking and taking certain drugs made from hemp. They had good conversations during these sessions:

> Apart from his profession and these intellectual conversations, Munshiji borrowed no other headaches for himself. He had no con-

9. Ram Vilas Sarma, *Premchand aur un-ka Yug* (2nd. ed.; Dilli, 1955), p. 133.
10. Kaushik, pp. 43–54.

nection with any national movement, any organization, any social reform. The Bengal partition came and the *Swadeshi* movement, the *naram* and *garam dals* were organized, political reforms appeared, the desires for self-rule had their birth pangs, the call for spiritual salvation began to ring through the land, but they made not the slightest difference to his deep equanimity.[11]

But one evening his servant comes back from the liquor shop empty-handed. He says the shop is being picketed and no one can pass. Munshi Maikulal, with his four companions, then goes himself. One of his companions, a Muslim, is stopped by a Muslim Maulana who says with great courtesy: "Friend, this is your prayer time, how is it you've come here? Do you think you can solve the Khilafat problem by this kind of religiousness?"[12] One by one Munshi Maikulal's friends are persuaded not only to turn away but to swear an oath that they will never touch another drop of liquor. But Munshi Maikulal bravely goes ahead, buys his bottle, and returns home. As he tries to drink alone, he first curses his friends on whom he has spent hundreds of rupees; then he thinks of all the angry eyes that looked at him as he went into the liquor shop; and finally he begins to see himself as a fool and a wastrel. In the end he throws his unfinished bottle crashing into the street.

Premchand also drew the village into his picture of the national movement. The story "Lag Dat" ("Hostility," 1921)[13] tells of two families in a village who had been fighting with each other for several generations. It had all started with a quarrel over land boundaries. There had been bloodshed and court cases. As a result the families are now prominent but poor. Around them the village has become divided into two groups. If one group uses *bhang*, a hemp drug, the other uses *charas*, a different hemp drug. They are so divided that even their social and religious views differ. Chaudhry, the family leader of one group, will eat parched grain without removing his clothes; Bhagat, the other leader, will not even drink water without removing his clothes. Chaudhry becomes an Arya Samajist, Bhagat becomes a Sanatan Dharmi.[14]

11. *Mansarovar*, VIII, 202–10. *Swadeshi* means indigenous product manufacture, i.e., the boycott of foreign products and encouragement of the use of domestic goods. *Naram dal* is the soft party, or conservatives; *garam dal* is the hot party, or revolutionaries.

12. *Ibid.*, VIII, 205. See also "Sarab-ki Dukan" ("Liquor Shop," 1930), *ibid.*, VII, 30–48.

13. *Ibid.*, VI, 202–8.

14. *Ibid.*, VI, 202. A Sanatan Dharmi is an orthodox religionist.

They patronize separate shopkeepers and consider it a crime even to look at each other's shopkeepers. When the non-co-operation movement comes to the village, Chaudhry joins the Congress, Bhagat the government. Chaudhry, being the nationalist, gradually begins drawing the larger audiences to hear him; Bhagat's arguments fail to convince even some of his own followers. One evening there are hundreds of people in front of Chaudhry's house. They have come from the surrounding villages to hear Chaudhry speak on nationalism. Just as Chaudhry finishes his speech, Bhagat, his lifelong enemy, suddenly appears and jumps up on the platform. "Brothers," he shouts,

> "Don't be surprised at seeing me here. I am not against self-rule. Who would be so low as to denounce self-rule? But the means of getting it are not those which Chaudhry has told you. . . . . As long as there is strife and quarreling among you, what good will panchayats do? When the spirit of pleasure rides you, how can you leave off drunkenness, or close up liquor shops? How will you get rid of cigarettes, soap, stockings, underwear shirts, and fine muslin? When you have the desire for power and authority, how will you leave the government schools and get free of irreligious education? To get self-rule there is only one way and that is self-control. This mighty medicine will cure all your ills. . . ."[15]

This speech ends the long hostility between the families.

Though Premchand's stories of this period give a picture of how man should live in order to be saved politically and socially, there were times when the writer in him got carried away and he became so identified with a character or a suituation that momentarily he forgot he was a Gandhian. Most stories ended in conversion of some sort, but the conversion was not inevitably non-violent. A drunkard in a liquor shop that is being picketed by Congress volunteers suddenly begins to feel sorry for the picketers whose non-violent measures seem so ineffective. In a flash of insight he sees his own mistaken behavior and he proceeds to beat all the regular customers in the shop and smash all the bottles on behalf of the nationalist movement.[16]

15. *Ibid.*, VI, 207–8. See also "Samar Yatra ("Battle Journey," 1930), *ibid.*, VI, 66–79.
16. *Ibid.*, VII, 61–65. See also "Istifa" ("Resignation," 1928), *ibid.*, V, 321–32, in which an often humiliated clerk finally summons the courage to go to his English supervisor's house and hit him over the head with a club.

In at least one other story, Premchand took pity upon a shopkeeper who was breaking Congress rules by selling the hated foreign cloth. A Congress volunteer, catching him in the act, reports him to the Congress party and he is fined 101 rupees. He cannot pay because his wife is sick and he has an aged mother and a child to look after. In despair he goes to the Congress headquarters and pleads his case. The Congress officials will not believe that a shopkeeper could be poor, and they refused the plea. When the shopkeeper returns home and tells his wife, she rises from her sick bed and shouts:

> "Very well, we will make them believe. Now I'll go and die in front of the Congress office. My child will stand and cry with hunger there too. If the Congress is going to do satyagraha with us, we will do satyagraha with them too and show them. Even in this dying condition I'll tear the Congress apart. If they are so heartless now, what kind of justice will they serve out when they get a little power?"[17]

Unfortunately, in the story the husband will not let his wife carry out her plan and the story ends with the shopkeeper going disconsolately to the moneylender.

In the stories of the independence movement, however, Premchand generally abided by the principles of non-violence. In "Samar Yatra" ("Battle Journey") the leader of the volunteers to a village, advising the villagers to stand up for their rights, says: " 'We are fighting for truth and justice. Therefore, we must fight with the weapons of truth and justice. We have need of a kind of hero who will root out violence and anger from his heart, and placing an immovable faith in God, endure anything for his service.' "[18] In "Ahuti" ("An Offering," 1930) an unmarried girl who has two suitors, one rich and handsome, the other poor and plain, chooses the plain one because he has left college and gone to serve the National movement in the villages. When the handsome suitor ridicules the plain one to the girl she merely looks up and sees in the sky the shadowy vision of Gandhi: "the weak, wizened, naked body, the dhoti reaching to his knees, the shiny bald head and withered face, the living image of penance, self-denial, and truth."[19]

17. *Ibid.*, I, 296–97. 18. *Ibid.*, VII, 71.
19. *Samar Yatra* (7th ed.; Ilahabad, 1963), p. 103.

Other stories dealt with the rehabilitation of Indians who had remained faithful to the British.[20] At the beginnings of these stories the characters are staunchly pro-government, but by the end they embraced the Congress cause. Premchand had by now become an expert in achieving the *volte-face*. His stories of this period bear a sameness of perspective, of characters pushed too far and too inevitably along the paths of rectitude. The stories, however, vary in their background scenery and much of their value lies in this. Sentence by sentence and story by story Premchand created a fictional Indian nationalist movement so comprehensive that the reader finally feels he has seen almost as much happen in almost as many situations to almost as many individuals as happened in all of Uttar Pradesh from 1920 to 1932.

When Gandhi called off the non-co-operation movement in 1922 because of acts of violence culminating in the burning of the Chauri Chaura police station with the policemen still inside it, the political agitation throughout the country subsided. Nehru came out of jail in January, 1923. He was surprised at his sudden release, but as he wrote later: "the time was propitious from the point of the government. The Congress was doing nothing against the government, and Congressmen were engrossed in mutual squabbles."[21] While the center of the political stage was empty, a group of Congressmen led by Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das and Motilal Nehru decided to contest elections to the government legislative councils with the idea that once they got in, they could obstruct the working of these councils. Meanwhile, the main body of the Congress turned instead to a program of social reform.

As these maneuvers were going on, the country was shaken by the bitter events of Hindu-Muslim communal hostility. The unity of these two communities, which had had its high points in the jointly declared Lucknow Pact of 1916 and in their combined front during the Khilafat movement opposing British action toward Turkey after World War I, now melted away. The Khilafat movement ended after the abolition of the Khilafat in 1924, leaving many Muslims without any

20. Two well-known examples of this type of story are "Lal Fita" ("The Red Ribbon," 1921) in Premchand's *Prem Caturthi* (2nd ed.; Banaras, 1959), pp. 48–73, and "Vicitra Holi" ("The Unusual Holi," 1921) in *Mansarovar*, III, 227–32.

21. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, p. 98.

compelling reason to follow Gandhi's non-violence and satyagraha. Bloody riots occurred all over India from 1922 to 1927, and thereafter the communal problem loomed ever larger and more insoluble. Nehru in 1935, writing his autobiography in jail, looked back on all this and wrote regretfully: "It is just possible that if civil resistance had not stopped in 1922 and the movement had been crushed by the Government, there would have been less communal bitterness and less superfluous energy left for the subsequent communal riots."[22] The bitterness of those years echoes even today in such recent (1964) words as these:

> What Britishers did was to exploit and aggravate the problem, but the problem was there even before their arrival and the seed cause of the problem, without which the problem could have had no existence, was religious fanaticism of the Muslims. Muslims. . . never regarded themselves as "Indians first." To them a Muslim foreigner was a nearer kith and kin than a Hindu neighbor. They were more sensitive to the misfortunes of their Turkish co-religionists than to the murder of their Hindu brethren at Zalianwala Bagh.[23]

Premchand turned to this communal hatred with intense indignation. In February, 1924, he wrote in *Zamana*:

> I say that if among the Hindus there had been one Kitchlew, Mohammad Ali or Shaukat Ali, all these things which appear to be the cause of this enmity, this organizing of Hindus, this hot market in *Suddhi*,[24] would not have happened and these riots would have been appreciably less. Not one responsible Congress leader has had the courage to raise his voice loud and announce his opposition to these movements. Pandit Motilal Nehru, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Lala Bhagwandas, Lala Sri Prakash—these men from whom we should hope for action with great moral courage one day expressed their opposition and horror, but the next day renounced these statements, and said publicly, "Those thoughts which we expressed about Suddhi and Hindu organizations were based on misunderstandings." When such people can be so pressured, then from whom can we

22. *Ibid.*, p. 87. 23. Kaushik, pp. 287–88.
24. Conversion or reconversion to Hinduism; literally, purification.

> expect justice? . . . Today, where is the Hindu who is giving his heart and soul for Hindu-Muslim unity, who realizes it as the most vital problem of Hindustan, who knows that unity is the fundamental stipulation for independence?[25]

That he found the problem important and that he strove to see the Muslim viewpoint are indicated above. In every possible way he tried to give the Muslims the benefit of the doubt.

On the question that Muslims were more interested in things outside India than inside, he referred in an earlier essay written during the Khilafat movement to a speech made at that time by Shaukat Ali, a Muslim leader, in Karachi. Shaukat Ali, Premchand says, had appealed for funds for the Khilafat movement. He had said to the Muslims: "If you are going to give one rupee for this ideal, then give twelve annas to Khilafat, and four annas to the Congress." From the Hindus he asked fourteen annas for Congress and two annas for the Khilafat movement. Many newspapers, Premchand says, had made capital of this, saying this showed that Muslims were more interested in problems outside of India, their birthplace.[26] Premchand answers thus:

> Musalmans believe the support of their religion is their most important duty, and in this they have every right. The question of nationalism is no eternal question. It is quite likely that with the growth of civilization the problem of nationalism may vanish and throughout the world brotherhood will spread. . . . But a Musalman will always remain a Musalman, and a Hindu always a Hindu. . . . If the desire of Hindus for independence is not for the sake of worldly power, what else is it for? The door to spiritual heights is not closed to anyone even now (even though he's not politically free). For this reason, even if the Musalmans love their religion four times as much as their country, there is no need for Hindus to cry out and be suspicious.[27]

On questions of the traceable causes of riots, such as the slaughtering of cows by Muslims, and the playing of musical instruments before mosques by Hindus, Premchand writes:

25. *Vividh Prasang*, II, 352.
26. *Ibid.*, II, 33.
27. *Ibid.*

> In the matter of cow slaughter, from the beginning up to now, the Hindus have adopted a completely unjust manner. We have the right to regard any animal as sacred that it pleases us, but to hope that believers of other religions should also believe it sacred, is a sure way of knocking heads with others. The cow is eaten all over the world; is this a reason that you are fit to behead the whole world? It can be no glory for even a meat-eating religion to teach enmity against the whole world, let alone for such a philosophical, broad, and cultured religion as that of the Hindus whose most sacred principle is "Ahimsa is the highest duty. . . ." If the Hindus still don't know that man is somewhat more sacred than any beast, whether it be Lord Krishna's cow or Jesus Christ's donkey, then they haven't even understood the alphabet of civilization.[28]

"It is a common complaint of Musalmans," he says concerning noise before mosques,

> that on the occasions of Hindu holidays and processions, musical instruments and marriage music is played in front of the mosque at prayer time. This is a natural complaint. Noise definitely places impediments in the way of worship, and if Musalmans insist that this noise be stopped then Hindus should see that their wishes are carried out. . . . Now the Hindus might say: "All right, don't let the Musalmans come with their processions making music in front of the Hindu temples." Outwardly this seems a very just request, but in practice the result of this could be that all musical instruments would be completely stopped in the cities, because the number of temples is so large that in some cities a temple appears after every other house. Also at the evening worship of Hindus, though they worship individually, still the ceremony is often accompanied by the ringing of bells and gongs. So if even when they are worshipping by themselves they don't consider silence necessary, with what mouth can they ask Musalmans for this?[29]

Premchand, during this period and to the end of his life, fought the battle of communal unity with the argument that without it there

28. *Ibid.*, II, 354.

29. *Ibid.*, II, 353.

could be no national unity, and without national unity there could be no Independence. Through the years he remained consistent. When he condemned a Muslim, he balanced it with condemnation of a Hindu. In 1924 he praised Shaukat Ali and denounced the Nehrus and others for their passivity in these matters. In 1931 he criticized Shaukat Ali for allegedly making the statement, "I am ready to fight a hundred thousand Gandhians single handed,"[30] and for later increasing the number to ten million. But he balanced the same article by criticizing Sardar Patel for reportedly saying: "In India there are plenty of people ready to start a hard fight, and those who dearly love their own lives, should get out of India."[31]

Premchand's stories closely reflect his editorial comments. He used basically three approaches to the problem. First, he wrote a series of stories of Muslim history in which he showed that Islam when spread by the sword was actually going against the real teachings of Islam.[32] Second, he created Muslim heroes who were truly religious Muslims, but who at the same time were religiously tolerant and wholly Indian in their patriotism. Third, when he chose to ridicule religious superstition or bigotry, he chose primarily brahmans for his subjects with only fleeting references to *mullahs* or maulvis.[33]

The Muslim hero of "Mandir aur Masjid" ("Temple and Mosque," 1925) illustrates a Premchandian Muslim within India. Chaudhry Itratali is a prominent Muslim *jagirdar*.[34] When British officials come to his lands he will not go to meet them, even though one of them happens to be the commissioner. He refuses to go inside any court. To stand in front of any judge with his hands pressed together, saying after every word, "Yes, your Honor," is against his principles. He is a scholar of Persian and Arabic, a strict follower of the Shariat.[35] He believes that taking of interest on loans is forbidden, prays five times a day, keeps the thirty-day fast, and continually reads the Koran.

30. *Ibid.*, II, 368. 31. *Ibid.*

32. "Nabi-ka Niti Nirvah ("The Prophet's Upholding of Principle," 1924), *Gupta Dhan*, II, 148–58; "Ksama" ("Forgiveness," 1924), *Mansarovar*, III, 196–204; "Dil-ki Rani" ("Queen of the Heart," 1933), *ibid.*, I, 189–209; and "Bauram" ("The Mad One," 1923), *ibid.*, VIII, 211–18.

33. Muslim theologians.

34. A type of landsowner who collects revenues and administers a district.

35. A body of sacred Islamic law.

But he was not narrow in his beliefs. It was his constant practice to bathe in the Ganges early every morning. Let it rain, let it frost, but at five o'clock he always arrived at the banks of the Ganges. Returning from his bath he carried his silver water jug filled with Ganges water, and he always drank Ganges water. In fact he drank no water but Ganges water. It is unlikely that any *yogi*[36] placed as much faith in it. On every seventh day his house was carefully smeared inside and out with cow dung. Not only this: in his large garden he kept a pandit year-round, to read the *Durga Path* [Siva readings]. The generosity and piety with which he treated *sadhus* and *sanyasis* astonished even maharajahs. . . . He also had food prepared in his kitchen for the Muslim *fakirs*,[37] and some one hundred and twenty-five always ate off his table cloth. . .his servants had strict orders that as much wood as was needed from his forests for burning the dead, for any religious sacrifice or feast, or for wedding ceremonies, were to be given without asking his permission.[38]

In this story "Mandir aur Masjid," there are vivid descriptions of Hindu-Muslim riots. Chaudry Itratali's Hindu servant, Thakur, though protected and defended at all times by his Muslim master, becomes a leader of the Hindus by reason of his brawn. When he sees Muslims beating Hindus, his

eyes saw red, the blood rushed to his head. Yelling, he rushed into the temple and laid about him with his club. On one side he alone, on the other fifty men. But Vare, what a tiger! Alone he flattened them out, knocking down and killing some. He was so maddened that he didn't see what he was doing, no matter who was living, who was dead. Where did he get such strength from? Vaguely he thought he must be getting strength from some goddess who had come to help him. God Krishna himself was there to guard him. In religious war supernatural things happen through man.[39]

In this section of town Hindus are more numerous than Muslims. In addition they have elected as their leader, Thakur, whose iron club everyone respects. Previously, although the Muslims were fewer in

36. Hindu holy men or ascetics.
37. Muslim mendicant or holy man.
38. *Gupta Dhan*, II, 159–60.
39. *Ibid.*, II, 161–62.

number, they were strong because they were better organized, but now that the Hindus are organized, what can a handful of Muslims do to them?

> Another year passed. Again came the celebration of Krishna's birth. . . . Secretly they [the Hindus] prepared. Today from early morning devotees gathered in the temple. All had clubs in their hands, many had knives hidden inside their waistbands. . . .
>
> The lights were lit. Evening prayers began in the mosques. The procession came out. Elephants, flags and banners, musical instruments, everything was with them. . . .
>
> The Juma Masjid appeared in sight. The heroes raised their clubs, everyone was alert. Those who had wandered apart, now gathered together. There was a little consultation in whispers. Suddenly the music blared forth louder than ever. Shouts of "Jai-Jai" rang out, "Victory-Victory." The procession arrived in front of the mosque.
>
> Suddenly a Muslim came out of the mosque. "It's prayer time. Shut off your music."
>
> Thakur: "The music will not be stopped."
>
> Muslim: "You'll have to stop it."
>
> Thakur: "Why don't you stop your prayers?"
>
> Muslim: "Don't try to make yourself big. . . ."
>
> Just then other Muslims came out and insisted that the music be stopped. On the other side the music became even louder. A maulvi called Thakur an infidel. Thakur grabbed him by the beard. That was it. All the warriors rushed out, the belaboring began. Letting out a war cry, Thakur entered the mosque, and the fighting began inside. One can't say who was successful. The Hindus said: "We smashed them thoroughly!" The Muslims said: "We beat them so they will never dare to face us again!"[40]

Premchand's third approach to the easing of communal tensions was to single out a certain class of Hindu brahmans for ridicule and through them impute the sincerity of those leaders of religion who betray the trust of their followers with fraudulent use of their position. These leaders use religious jargon to fill their stomachs, as in the story

40. *Ibid.*, II, 166–67.

"Manusya-ka Param Dharm" ("Man's Highest Duty," 1920), described in the previous chapter. The same hero, Moteram Sastri, who is perhaps Premchand's only recurring character, plays the leading part in this period in trying to break up a non-co-operation strike organized by the Congress to coincide with the viceroy's arrival in Banaras.[41] The officials of the town want to give the viceroy a great reception; the Congress wants all shops closed. The officials finally call on Pandit Moteram Sastri to help them keep the shops open. He assembles a meeting of all the banias and merchants in town and tells them that if they close their shops he will fast to the death. "The banias and merchants of the city, who were mostly blind followers of religion, were so agitated by this that"[42] the threats of Congress had no effect on them. With the viceroy scheduled to arrive in three days, Moteram Sastri seems too fat to be able to fast to death in that period of time. Nevertheless, only one merchant in the audience has any doubts. He says: "Maharaj, your life will take a full month to ebb out in fasting. In three days what can happen?"[43]

The story describes how Moteram Sastri secretly breaks his fast several times at night when no one is looking, but during the day he has to abide by it. This weakens him considerably, and he lies all day dreaming of food. Finally, on the day before the viceroy's arrival, the Congress leader comes to see Moteram, seeking to tempt him with a bag of the most luscious sweets. The smell coming from the bag is too much for Moteram Sastri and he forgets all about the viceroy or keeping the shops open. While he is eating, the Congressman calls in a delegation of banias and merchants to see their leader, and they find Moteram absorbed in his eating "like some mahatma lost in contemplation of the absolute."

> The leading merchant said: "I touch the Panditji's feet. We were just coming, why couldn't you wait? We could have told you about this trick and you could have kept your promise and the task would have been accomplished."
>
> Moteram: "My work is done. This food brings an otherworldly

41. "Satyagrah" ("Truth Force," 1923), *Mansarovar*, III, 282–97.
42. *Ibid.*, III, 288. 43. *Ibid.*

bliss that piles of money could not bring. If you still have any faith, send to this same shop for the same amount of the same."[44]

The decade from 1920 to 1930 has been called the Gandhian period because the imprint of Gandhi's hand lay upon all its events. He led the movements for independence and sobered the communal passions with his fasts. The thought that he might die during a fast conjured up the prospect of dire events, and this brought men of all communal stamps to the conference table. While there were those who did not agree with him, their opposition could not lead the nation their own way. Gandhi set the pace, he stood in the center of things, and whatever he did men were forced to notice and react to, whether they liked what he did or not. "It is true to say," writes Nehru, "that there is a waning and waxing of Gandhiji's popularity among the intelligentsia. In moments of forward going enthusiasm they follow him; when the inevitable reaction comes they grow critical. But even so the great majority of them bow down to him. Partly this has been due to the absence of any other effective program."[45] The power of Gandhi on Nehru himself is shown when it is considered how Nehru, so different from Gandhi in much of his outlook, doubting, often objecting, not quite seeing what would be the outcome of certain projects, sometimes dismayed, occasionally even resigning (temporarily) his Congress posts, yet felt constrained in spite of it all to follow along.

Premchand, as has been described, was one of those whom Gandhi's presence touched at Gorakhpur, and the influence upon him was not temporary. The effect of the non-co-operation–civil disobedience move-

44. *Ibid.*, III, 297. In *Jagaran* (March, 1934), under the title "Hindu Samaj-ke Vibhatsya Drsya" ("A Disgusting Aspect of Hindu Society"), Premchand belabors a certain type of ascetic. "In Hindu society all that is needed to worship is to tie on a loincloth and smear some ashes over the body. If you become expert at taking gaja and charas (hemp drugs), so much the better. After mastering these frauds the Babaji (ascetic) becomes a god. He may be stupid, deceitful, low, but all this means nothing. He is a baba. Baba has renounced the world, he has kicked over the snares of illusion, what more is necessary? Now he is a treasury of learning, he has reached selflessness; we search for masterful subtleties in his insane speech, and consider him a treasure house of supernatural powers. The next thing that happens is a crowd of seekers of boons gathers about him. Merchants and moneylenders, subordinate court officers, the ladies of prominent families come to be benefited by a view of him. Nobody wonders how a dull-witted, evil-looking, licentious man can become a saint just by putting on a loincloth" (*Vividh Prasang*, III, 157).

45. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, p. 128.

ments on his writing and his conciliatory stories of communal problems is clear, and though Premchand deviated at times, the areas of agreement were large. When Gandhi moved away from politics for some years during this decade and turned his attention to his social program, it is not surprising to find the major focus of Premchand's stories turning, too, to the social problems that seemed to lie in the way of political freedom.

S. Natarajan, in his book *A Century of Social Reform in India*, quotes Annie Besant's periodical *New India* as saying in 1928: "Mr. Gandhi is a first-rate social reformer, but as Dr. Besant has often said, he is not a politician. Naturally as he dominated the Congress, he has turned it into a Social Reform League and has stopped its political work."[46] Thus it may have appeared to many observers at that time, but as far as most patriotic Indians seemed to be concerned, this social reform had become the significant way at the moment to seek Independence.

Some of Gandhi's most dramatic efforts such as the struggle against untouchability, the encouragement of spinning and weaving, and the wearing of *khadi*[47] were items in his program that achieved immense popularity. These and the picketing of shops selling liquor and foreign cloth were things that everyone could see. They happened out in the street and helped dramatize the struggle, drawing hundreds of thousands of volunteers to serve the cause of their country.

All these things are illustrated in Premchand's stories, but perhaps the subject of his single greatest concern was that of the many problems of women, family life, and marriage.[48] Gandhi was very conscious of the evils that had hemmed Indian women in for centuries. He wrote and spoke often in their behalf, but the home and the tyranny of husbands and mothers-in-law, the questions of child brides and dowry, the horror of too many daughters—these were problems that did not lend themselves to mass picketing or mass civil disobedience. You could picket outside of temples against castes who prevented outcastes

46. S. Natarajan, *A Century of Social Reform in India* (2nd ed.; Bombay, 1962), p. 70.
47. Coarse, handwoven cloth.
48. For a description of many of the problems of women during Premchand's time, see Mrs. Sinclair Stevenson, *The Rites of the Twice-Born* (London, 1920).

from entering, but it was difficult to picket against dowry and other evils of marriage when even the picketers practiced the customs.

During this period when Premchand wrote almost 150 stories, the problems of women were important in more than half of them. Indeed, it may be said that the stories of this decade, following a century of reform from the abolition of sati in 1829 to the formation of the All India Women's Conference in 1927, present an intimate review of how generally unsuccessful the laws and the social efforts had been. A Hindi critic who has written a book about Premchand's women characters sums them up in this way:

> Premchand regards women as higher than men because of their lofty and spiritual qualities. . . . Service and affection are their basic nature and love is the foundation of their life. The woman's heart is made of the subtle principles of service. Mother-love is so predominant in a woman that if it be said she is only mother, that whatever there may be beyond this is all a prelude to motherhood, it would not be an exaggeration. In her is such a strong mother love and as she grows older it becomes so deep, that she begins to regard a young man as a son and her heart is not touched with the flavors of desire. The life principle of a woman is love and she is unmatched in her upholding of its highest ideals—self-sacrifice, unselfishness, absence of passion. In one sentence, woman is the visible image of service, self-denial, self-sacrifice, purity, love, affection, self-control, courtesy, forgiveness, firmness, forebearance, modesty, pride and other beautiful and generous emotions.[49]

This detailed classification of Premchand's women contains a certain portion of truth. It is true that one sees many of his women characters put into difficult situations through no fault of their own; and there, as if with well-practiced movements, they go through the exercises of service, self-denial, self-sacrifice, purity, love, affection. Premchand's heroines, from childhood to old age, are often hemmed in by social circumstances that are weighted against them. They become literary pawns. If they have a literary chance to change the outcome of

49. Gita Lal, *Premchand-ka Nari Citran* (Dilli, 1965), p. 410.

a story it is because all the good qualities itemized above occasionally can melt the hearts of their male oppressors. In some stories their spiritual perfection alone has enabled them to escape being doormats under their husbands' feet, but they often appear too good to be true.

The above listing of the characteristics of Premchand's women, however, refers in large part to his middle-class Hindu heroines. His works also contain mothers-in-law, grandmothers, mothers, middle-aged wives, and many other secondary characters who, while enslaved by custom or superstition or cruel husbands, nevertheless have personalities elastic enough to hold such contrasting qualities as self-denial and self-indulgence, forebearance to a husband and tyranny to a daughter-in-law. Thus the over-all view of Premchand's writing is not of a land filled only with sickly, saintly, middle-class women. They may go along with their eyes down and cover their faces when a strange man looks at them, but they can have sharp and clever tongues, dripping with irony, abuse, and humor. They fight in their own way against their fate; they use their tears and tongues effectively. They cannot all, therefore, be dismissed as creatures without blood or believability.

The low-caste woman is not proscribed from remarrying. She is much freer to take up with any man.[50] Her actions are less supervised; she is not shut up within four walls. To a certain extent she has to use her wits. Another type of woman who contrasts with the middle-class Hindu heroine is the modern, Western-educated woman.[51] Premchand's treatment of these characters merely shows that, though he has freely denounced the evils in Hindu marriage customs, he does not recommend copying Western marriage ways. These women are above marriage; they love their freedom; pleasure is their dominant aim in life; things like service, self-denial, self-sacrifice, and modesty are outside their sphere.

The tone of the stories dealing with low-caste women is, however, generally set in love, faithfulness, and service to husband and family. Even the Western-educated women sometimes are drawn to regret

50. See "Sudra" (1926), *Mansarovar*, II, 352–74. See also "Ghaswali" ("The Grass-cutter," 1929), *ibid.*, I, 298–311; "Gharjamai" ("Son-in-law in the Home," 1929), *ibid.*, I, 142–54; "Alagvojha" ("Separate Arrangements," 1929), *ibid.*, I, 13–14.

51. For further details of Premchand's women other than the middle-class heroines, see below, pp. 119–20.

their ways and to see the emptiness of their lives. It is with women who have gentleness, are long-suffering, and who practice self-denial that Premchand has his heart. He takes them through many sufferings as wives, widows, prostitutes; he disguises them as brahman women or chamarins, but whatever their identity they are generally put there to draw the reader's pity and to plead for a reform.

Premchand in his non-fictional writing shows he feels intellectually that women should have equal rights with men.[52] He did not like the idea of divorce, which would form one manner of escape for women from their bondage, but he came to the point of accepting it if necessary: "If such evils had not crept into modern Hindu marriage, what would have been the need of a divorce bill?"[53] In his fiction he deals with many of these evils. From his stories could be drawn up a fairly extensive encyclopedia of women's problems, perhaps beginning and ending with the custom of dowry, but illustrating all manner of injustice done to women from before their births to their deaths as widows.

The story "Uddhar" ("Deliverance," 1924)[54] begins with a denunciation of Hindu marriage practices.

> The marriage customs of Hindu society have become so defiled, so troublesome, so dreadful, that no one knows how they can be reformed. Rare would be the parents who, even after seven sons, would welcome with joy the birth of a girl. As a girl is born, the worry about her marriage fills their minds, and a man is submerged by it. The condition has become so desperate and dangerous that there are not a few mothers and fathers who experience a heartfelt gladness when a daughter dies, as if a weight has been lifted from their heads. The reason for this is simply that the fear of dowry rises, double by day, fourfold by night, like the rush of the monsoon water.[55]

A woman's problems begin before birth. In the story "Nairasya" ("Despair," 1924)[56] a woman named Nirupama who kept giving birth to daughters and no sons, and as a result was humiliated and treated

52. *Vividh Prasang*, III, 249.
53. *Ibid.*, III, 258.
54. *Mansarovar*, III, 37–46.
55. *Ibid.*, III, 37–38.
56. *Ibid.*, III, 115–25.

as a slave in her home, found that by going to see a famous holy man and getting a guarantee from him that the next child would be a son, she could gain for herself nine months' respite.

> When she became pregnant, new hopes began to flutter in everyone's heart. Her mother-in-law whose every indrawn breath before had carried curses and every exhalation sarcasm, now moved around her like a proferred dish of betelnut. "Daughter, let it be, I will prepare dinner, your head will begin to ache!" If Nirupama went to fill a jar of water or lift a bed, her mother-in-law came running. "Daughter, let it be, I'm coming, you musn't lift anything heavy. It's a different matter with daughters, nothing affects them, but boys must be respected even in the womb. . . ."
>
> Golden ornaments had been made for the baby; a beautiful milk cow had been bought for his milk; Gharmandilal [the father] had bought a little carriage for him to go out in.[57]

Sadhus were assembled to record the auspicious moment of birth. A hunter came to shoot off his gun; ballad singers were there to sing songs of joy. But all failed. The child was another girl.

When a Hindu girl reached the time of marriage her helplessness was revealed in its most painful form. In Premchand's stories references are often made to the pressure put upon parents by neighbors and caste fellows to get the girl married. Divorce for a girl of the twice-born castes was unthinkable; marriage was for life. There was no escape. The haunting presence of the dowry filled the minds of parents. The girl was aware of this, but was helpless. There were a few liberal fathers who provided that the boy and girl might see each other before marriage, and who would not let the marriage take place if there was not approval, but generally this was not so. Thus, behind the pageantry of the wedding itself lay the seed of tragic happenings.

A boy, about to be married, dreamed of his unseen bride:

> By the time he was old enough, he began to think about her who would be the queen of his heart. There would be the gaiety of Usha[58] in her, the softness of a flower, the glistening of gold, the bloom of spring, the voice of the *koyal*. . . .[59]

57. *Ibid.*, III, 119–20.
58. Goddess of dawn.
59. Indian cuckoo.

Then the time of the wedding came.

The marriage party came out with great splendor and tumult. The bride, covered with jewelry, entered the ceremonial pavilion, and Bipin could see her hands and her feet. What beautiful fingers, like the pointed flames of candles, how elegant was her form! Bipin could hardly contain his joy.

The next day the bride was to be taken to the groom's home. On the road he was so anxious to see the bride that once when the bearers of the covered palanquin set it down so they could go and wash their faces and hands, he tiptoed up. She had pushed aside her veil and was looking out of the palanquin. Bipin saw her. Hatred, anger, and despair raced like waves through him. This was not the matchless beauty he had dreamed of. . .this was a wide-faced, pug-nosed, fat-cheeked ugly woman. Her face was fair but instead of a delicate blush there was only whiteness, and how can the color make up for the lack of beauty. O, is this to be tied to me, will I get no other for the rest of my life?[60]

The unfortunate girl, meanwhile, must endure without recourse the dislike or indifference of her husband. She may come to a home where the habits of life are different from her own, to a mother-in-law and a father-in-law who are totally unlike her own parents.

From the day Lila put her foot in the door her testing began. All the things for which she was praised at home were forbidden here. She had been taught all her life to love the fresh air, but here it was a crime to uncover her face before it. Sant Saran [her father-in-law] was a sour, angry man; he wouldn't let even a fly sit on his nose. He had gathered his wealth by falsehood and deceit and he thought this was the recipe for a successful life. His wife was at least two fingers' breadth worse than he. It was unthinkable that her daughter-in-law stand at the door of her dark room or go up on the roof for air. . . . She had a talking disease. If there was a little too much salt in the *dal*[61] it was enough to give her an excuse for scolding all day. She was a fat healthy woman, wearing a calico shirt, keeping a holder

60. *Ibid.*, III, 31–32.

61. Split pea preparation.

of pan beside her. Loaded down with jewelry she sat all day on a wooden platform-bed on the porch. What right had anyone to even shake a leaf against her wishes! Seeing the new ways of her daughter-in-law she was constantly irritated.[62]

The last stage in a woman's life, widowhood, often came when she was young in years because she may have been married to an old man who had been able to be lenient in his demands for dowry. The death of a husband when his wife was still young did not provide an outlet of escape for her. Apart from her personal jewelry she had no economic independence,[63] and without that she was utterly helpless.

In the same year both her mother and her husband died. In this calamity she knew of no one to whom she could turn but her uncle Vansidhar. The behavior of Vansidhar up to now could offer no hope that she would be able to live there in peace, but she was ready to endure anything. She would endure the cursing, scolding, even beating. At least there could be no doubts cast on her, no false blemishes; she would be free from profligate and licentious men. Vansidhar was a little worried about the question of caste propriety, but he could not refuse Mani's pleas.[64]

In the above story the girl, Mani, was treated like a menial because she was a widow. She was rebuked constantly and her life was miserable. When the daughter of the family was getting married, Mani went in to look at the bride in her finery. The mother, seeing her, shouted out in front of all the guests: "Who called you? Get out of here." A young man fell in love with Mani and wanted to marry her, but it had to be done secretly. Fortunately, the son of the family was kind to Mani and he helped her. "You must say nothing of this at all to mother and father. You know why. They will curse you, and in their anger might even kill you, but they will never agree to your marriage."[65] Later Mani, having written a letter to Vansidhar informing him of her marriage, went to see him to get his blessing. As was to be expected he was furious and cursed her thus:

62. *Ibid.*, III, 71–72.
63. Gita Lal, p. 30.
64. *Mansarovar*, I, 209.
65. *Ibid.*, I, 215.

"Don't touch me. Stand apart, you devil. After putting black on my face you write me a letter. How is it that death doesn't strike you down? You have disgraced my caste. . . . Isn't there any water left in the Ganges for you? I consider you so vile, so unchaste that I should have cut your throat on the first day. . . . For someone so riddled with evil as you it would be better to die, the weight on the earth would be less."[66]

Underlying most of the difficulties of these unhappy women was the custom of paying dowry to the groom's family. Premchand mentioned the practice in editorials with unconcealed scorn.

Everyone denounces the custom of dowry, but that gentleman who shouts the most in public meetings, asks the most dowry and swallows up the largest amounts. . . . If this year you have to marry off your daughter, you join the organization and weep loudly about dowry payments, but tomorrow when the time comes for your son's marriage then you become a reincarnation of greed.[67]

In "Ek Ac-ki Kasar" ("A False Flame") Premchand illustrates this. Yasodanand was a man who was famous not only in his own city but in the whole province. He was a man of high ideals. Because of his principles he cared not the least for money. He refused all dowry payments for his son for whom he arranged a great wedding ceremony, to which came numerous important people, all praising Yasodanand fulsomely for living up to his noble ideals. After the ceremonies were over, Yasodanand stood up on a chair and addressed his guests. He had written the speech out. He gave the history of the practice of dowry giving. In the end he tried to be humble about himself by concluding:

Now we have reached a condition where newspapers comment on my trifling, very trifling services as if I have done some unusual thing. I tell you, if you wish to keep on living in this world, then get

66. *Ibid.*, I, 220. "Betowali Widhwa" ("The Widow with Sons," 1932), *ibid.*, I, 67–88, tells of an old woman who, as soon as her husband died, began to lose status in her own home as her sons gradually ignored her authority. In the end she slipped—not too unwillingly—into the Ganges and was drowned. In "Dhikkar" ("The Curse"), the story of Mani, the girl widow about to be remarried felt she was unworthy of the young man and would spoil his life, so she jumped from the train in the middle of the night.

67. *Vividh Prasang*, III, 255.

rid of this custom at once. . . . It is a crime against God that such low, avaricious people, wealth-worshippers, merchants in free gifts, sellers of their own children are still alive and are happy.[68]

When he had finished his speech Yasodanand brought his youngest son, a little boy of about seven years of age, before the audience. The boy, too, had written a little speech of welcome. Yasodanand meanwhile went into the house to make some arrangements. The little boy began reading his speech, but he had picked up the wrong paper from his father's desk. This was a secret letter from the bride's father to Yasodanand.

It seems from your letter that you don't trust me. As God is my witness I tell you that the settled amount will reach you so secretly that there will be not the slightest suspicion. Yes, there is one request I do presume to ask. Because of the honor and benefits of reputation you will gain by this business being kept secret, and because of the accusations I will get from my friends and relatives, what benefits will I get in this connection? My humble request is that five thousand be cut from the twenty-five thousand so that justice may be done to me.[69]

This period of Premchand's writing has been called the Gandhian period. The events which Gandhi called forth in 1920–22 and again from 1930 are assembled here in fictional guise, as are the events which Gandhi could not control—the communal riots and the age-long burden of social habit backed by the authority of time. Of the early 1920's Premchand's biographer writes: "Each of the stories which came from his pen during this time was in some way or other connected with the independence movement. A good soldier does not waste even one of his bullets."[70] Another critic says: "The writer takes the evils of society and by means of duty, pity, manhood, etc., remedies them."[71] A third critic writes: "Future historians, if they do not have a special lack of

68. *Mansarovar*, III, 87–93.
69. *Ibid.*, III, 91.
70. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 297.
71. Ramratan Bhatnagar, "Premchand-ki Kahaniya," in Madan, ed., *Premchand: Cintan aur Kala* (Banaras, n.d.), p. 112.

interest in literature, will find a real picture of the Gandhi age in the stories of Premchand written between 1920 and 1932."[72]

The stories constitute a social document. In them the reader sees a Premchand who has taken his old ideals and brought them into a laboratory, testing them on problem after problem. But one feels that the experiments are not real experiments, because the answers were already known. The ingredients put into the tests are real: the picketing, the pathetic widows, the Hindu-Muslim riots, the District magistrates. They all existed. They can be read about in the newspapers. But where newspapers would stop after describing the day's events, Premchand had to arrange them to construct a purposeful ideal. The ideals were not Premchand's own. He certainly believed them, but they were the specific and common ideals shared in great measure by all the great patriots, social reformers, and religious teachers of his era. Gandhi put a new stamp upon the age, gave it specific directions, and presented it with a set of commandments. Premchand generally followed and so it may be said that his middle-period literature had two aspects: a realistic documentation of events and problems, and Gandhian recommendations for their solution.

It is with the recommendations or lessons that critics of literature may raise questions. There appears to be a characteristic of literature that when lessons or recommendations become too pointed, the actions of fictional characters will become too predictable, and the individual character will become too submissive to an ideal to be able to emerge with a true individuality. Premchand takes us into houses and huts and bazaars, and so we see the whole scene in a part of India from 1920 to 1932, but he does not take us into the hidden places of characters' minds. A good character is not so much personally good as socially good. An evil character is all evil and there is no indication why. All strong human urges are sublimated to the presentation of Premchand's ideals for society. Love contains no sex. It is Gandhi's "conquest and sublimation of the sex passion,"[73] and sex is fictionally ignored. In place of the dialogue of real lovers there is an exposition of ideal love.

72. Visnu Prabhakar, "Premchand Kathakar," in Gurtu, ed., *Premchand aur Gorki* (Dilli, 1955), p. 232.

73. M. K. Gandhi, *India of My Dreams* (Rev. ed.; Ahmedabad, 1959), p. 241.

It may be as one critic has written, that in Premchand's India "the relationship of marriage being settled, the lover cannot approach the beloved; he has to stop, nor does he get another chance to revive the love. The reason is that in the society there is no courtship custom, nor do women after marriage move about in the society. They are confined to their homes."[74]

There may be social norms in Hindu society calling for middle-class heroines to behave outwardly according to certain patterns, but in literature one expects individual dreams or rebellions even behind cultural walls. Premchand shows a few such women in his late period, though to be sure they are seldom middle-class heroines. In this period his literature at its best is amusing, interesting for the description of the period; often the dialogue is expressive and effective. The plots are frequently simpler than in the earlier period; there is a general tightening up of construction; but still his characters seem to exist primarily to show love of country, or communal unity, or political independence, or a social reform.

74. Satyendra, *Premchand: un-ki Kahani Kala* (Agra, n.d.), p. 244.

Six THREE STRANDS OF CRITICISM, 1932–1936

During the greater part of Premchand's writing career he regarded himself as a writer with a message, a writer with a moral obligation to rid his society of many evils which he specifically pinpointed. The manner in which he could bring tears to the eyes of a stonehearted landlord or cause a prostitute to emerge as a spokesman for modesty placed the accent of his work upon his beliefs and ideals, and gave secondary importance to his literary skills. This has prompted critics to regard him primarily as a Gandhian or a Marxist or an idealistic realist or a nationalist.

The final period of Premchand's writing, however, shows clear evidence, both from his expressed views at this time on short story writing and from a number of the stories themselves, that he had become increasingly aware of the power which form and technique could exert upon the effectiveness of a short story. This period may be regarded as illustrating the struggle between the claims of moral purpose in his work and the claims of artistic expression. By the end of Premchand's life there was apparent a greater and more conscious technical scrutiny of his subject matter that released his characters from the burden of their creator's views or brought these views under the discipline of artistic tenets.

The nature of Premchand's final development may be described by an analysis of three major strands of criticism made of his work by his Hindi critics. While all critics admit to a new "realism" in his writing, this has not always been ascribed to his new mastery of technique. One group of critics finds that the content and treatment of these stories showed no fundamental change in Premchand. He remained what he had once called himself, an idealistic realist, or a Gandhian. When these critics speak of the new realism in Premchand's later

stories, they suggest that the stories have more truth to life and more probability—for instance, a villain will not now become a hero without adequate and clever preparation. However, they stress the point that the villain will still usually become a hero, and that the ideal of social uplift is still clearly evident.[1] The communist and Marxist critics, on the other hand, purport to see that the greater accent on realism in his later work, following the dominant idealism of his early work, revealed more than just technical maturity. They see in the change that Premchand had also altered his political, economic, and social views during the period.[2] A third group of critics has recognized and placed importance upon varying technical aspects of his work, to which they ascribe much of the cause for his new excellence as a writer.

Although the critical views of Premchand's later work fall generally into the three classes listed above, many of the critics do not consistently fit into such rigid categories. There are seepages of opinion from one category to another: Marxists and idealists admit to technical improvements in the work, and critics of form concede evidence of communism or socialism or Gandhism. The three strands of criticism, thus, are generalized descriptions of Premchand's later work, and not of the detailed exceptions made by individual critics.

For the large number of critics who found unmistakable evidence of a Gandhian or reforming imprint in Premchand's earlier work, such new realism (as seen particularly in his late village stories) presented some difficulties for them in maintaining that Premchand remained essentially an idealist to the end. Occasionally, a critic expressed disappointment in some of his later work:

> I have read his last novel *Godan* with fitting respect, but my heart did not find in it that which I found in *Rangbhumi* [an earlier novel]. In *Rangbhumi* a blind beggar brought about a movement of unusual enlightment by his renunciation and power of spirit. It was an example of what soul force can do. In *Godan* [1936] we find no such noble character.[3]

1. Nandadulare Bajpeyi, "Kahaniya," in Madan, ed., *Premchand: Cintan aur Kala* (Banaras, n.d.), p. 113.
2. Amrtrai, "Premchand: Ek Paricay," in *ibid.*, p. 203.
3. Haribhau Upadhyaya, quoted in Gupta, p. 339.

Nevertheless, the critics who found Premchand an idealist or a Gandhian or an idealistic realist contend that even though his economic views may have leaned toward socialism in the end, they were based on liberal and humanitarian views that came to him from Indian tradition, refurbished perhaps by Dayananda Saraswati, Vivekananda, Tolstoi, Gandhi, and others, but conforming to no doctrinaire position though representative of a strong desire to see abolished the great inequalities between man and man.[4]

In the matter of class warfare, a communist tenet, the critics argue that like Gandhi, Premchand wanted zamindars and wealthy merchants to regard themselves as trustees of the interests of laborers and tillers of the soil.[5] As late as 1930, for example, he had written in his monthly *Hans*:

> If the zamindars would not stain themselves so much with their injustices that their existence is disgusting in the eyes of others, they would for ages remain the chiefs, the leaders and the protectors of the kisan. After independence, of course, land rents will be somewhat reduced—the kisans will not accept less than 50 per cent, and along with that the zamindar's wealth will be reduced, but will self-rule be so empty of justice and righteousness that it will snatch away the proper rights of any group? This is not possible.
>
> The zamindars will remain, their honor and respect will remain, their influence will also remain. Of course, free labor will not remain, free gifts will not remain, secret looting will not remain, but they will still be the kings of their own homes. Those greetings, flatteries, bowings, payments of cash, which in the past they have had to give to their rulers, will all vanish. To be sure, wealth will be somewhat less, but in exchange for this their honor will increase and they will become true leaders of society.[6]

These critics maintain that while Premchand accepted the existence of classes, he did not believe that class warfare was a prerequisite to

4. Nandadulare Bajpeyi, *Premchand: Sahityik Vivecan* (Jalandhar, 1956), pp. 149–51.
5. Rajeswar Guru, *Premchand: Ek Adhyayan* (Bhopal, 1958), p. 104.
6. *Vividh Prasang*, II, 42–43.

creating a new society.[7] Premchand, however, did believe in struggle, they claim. He did not believe in running away from reality, and he found that in struggle lies hope and this hope is his idealism. He used reality only to bring readers to believe in his fictional world. He considered the aim of literature to be the uplift of mankind, and for this reason he had no real interest in stark reality. Stark reality—because men are all wicked or partially stained—tends to draw the bleak, the harsh, the evil, and this gives rise to the hopelessness in which there ceases to be struggle.[8]

These critics also claim that Premchand's denunciations of the evils in society were tempered by his "complete faith in the goodness and usefulness of the basic traditions of Indian life. . . . He did not wish to see spoiled the Indian system of marriage or the Indian view of love,"[9] for example.

> The meaning of reform to him was not a blind following of the West. *Godan* was his last work. While writing this he had already studied Western socialism, the gleam of which shows everywhere in this book. Nevertheless, he did not follow it. In the mouths of some of his characters he comments on it in relation to women's education, family, and married life. Always his ideal culture was Indian, not a copy of the Western. Against the claim of women's equality with men, Premchand speaks through the mouth of the philosopher, Mr. Mehta. Men have been unjust to women, and Mr. Mehta, agreeing with this, says: "Wipe out injustice but don't wipe out yourselves." And then: "In life the greatest power comes from service and self-denial; this you [women] have got."[10]

7. Nagendra, "Premchand," in Sacirani Gurtu, ed., *Premchand aur Gorki* (Dilli, 1955), p. 114.

8. Ram Vilas Sarma, "Adars aur Yatharth," *Premchand: Kritiya aur Kala*, ed. Premnarayan Tandan (Lakhnau, 1954), pp. 190–91.

9. Satyendra, *Premchand: un-ki Kahani Kala*, pp. 265–66.

10. B. V. Pararkar, "Premchand-ki Krti," in Gurtu, ed., *Premchand aur Gorki*, pp. 77–78. W. Norman Brown's description of an ancient Indian concept of a ceremonial Act of Truth (*Satyakriya*) may not be inappropriate here. Satyakriya, he writes, "was a solemn asseveration of the complete perfection with which the declarer fulfilled his duty in the cosmic scheme. If in this respect his conduct was flawless, he had attained truth itself, he had reached his highest goal. He had become one with the universe, and in becoming one had acquired a special power in it, even over it, for it was himself" (*The United States and India and Pakistan* [Cambridge, Mass., 1963], p. 100).

In their analyses these critics draw forth arguments that cover a wide spectrum.[11] Premchand was a "traditionalist," but he could also be a "progressive."[12] He was a realist tempered by idealism.[13] He was a Gandhian but with his own modifications. Their views depend primarily on an analysis of the subject matter of his works. They evade the question of the technical development of the author as perhaps being partially responsible for the quality of greater realism, or "truth to life," in his later stories—a realism which they, however, generally acknowledge.

As will be pointed out later, Premchand's final stories of village life, with their stark realism and the basic fight for survival unrelieved by explicit social cures, could perhaps lend themselves to the claim that he had become disillusioned with Gandhian prescriptions. However, when we move to the stories of middle-class life where the fight for survival is replaced by more subtle societal aims, the claims of Premchand's continued adherence to Gandhian or other social uplift and idealistic solutions find their strongest defense. The themes of these stories, enmeshed in some authorial purpose, often veer from what would normally be expected in life, and they illustrate perhaps best the continuing stress of social purpose that lingers even into his last years. In these stories, however, may be distinguished the early evidences, too, of Premchand's struggle to bring his subject matter under the discipline of conscious technical scrutiny.

The story "Kayar" ("The Coward," 1933)[14] tells of the love of a brahman boy and a vaisya girl, classmates in college. The boy scorns old-fashioned ideas about inter-caste marriages. He loves the girl, Prema, and not her caste. The girl, however, hesitates: "What right have I over my own body? That which my parents created with their own blood, which they nourished with their love—there can be no doubt that I can do nothing which will go against their wishes."

Her parents arrange her marriage with a vaisya boy of her own caste, studying for the I.C.S. This rouses in her some rebellion. Now

11. Gopalkrisna Kaul, "Gandhivad, Pragativad aur Premchand," in Gurtu, ed., *Premchand aur Gorki*, pp. 186–94. See also Guru, pp. 8–18.

12. Indar Nath Madan, *Premchand: Ek Vivecan* (Dilli, n.d.), p. 136. See also Kaul, p. 193.

13. Guru, p. 64.

14. *Mansarovar*, I, 227–38.

she thinks: "This body belongs to my parents but whatever my spirit will have to endure, it will have to endure in this body. . .without dedicating one's spirit, can there be such a thing as love?" She contrives to let her father know about her true love. The shock to him is great, but when he finds her grieving through the following months he begins to fear for her health and becomes resigned to the incredible. "It is useless," he says to his wife, "to hope that a bird having once opened its wings will decide to alight and live in your courtyard." He goes accordingly to see the brahman boy's father. The elder brahman, hearing his proposal, is furious and shouts: "What are you saying? Don't you have any shame? I am a brahman and of the highest even among brahmans. No matter how low brahmans may have become they have not become such destroyers of tradition that they should go around marrying their sons to bania shopkeepers.' "

The brahman father threatens to cut off his son without a penny if he marries Prema. Under this pressure the boy reconsiders his views and writes a letter to Prema, saying he has changed his mind about marrying her. Prema reads the letter carefully.

> She kept busy all day doing the housework, as if she had no worries or cares. At night she prepared dinner for everyone, then she ate her own dinner, and until late that night played on her harmonica and sang.
>
> But when morning came, her body lay dead in her room. The golden rays of the early morning sun gave to her face the appearance of shining life.

The story "Kusum" (1932)[15] is told mostly in the letters of a young married woman to her husband who is completely indifferent to her. She stays with her parents because he does not send for her nor answer her letters. There are five letters.

> My lord, have you thought against whom you are holding this anger? That helpless one who is prostrate at your feet, asking for the gift of your forgiveness, who through this and after births will remain your slave, can she endure this anger. . . . One ember from this fire of anger is enough to turn her to ashes.[16]

15. *Ibid.*, II, 5–26. *Kusum* is a girl's name, and also that of a flower.
16. *Ibid.*, II, 10.

. . . . .

You are the sun, I am a small particle; you are fire, I am a blade of grass; you are a king, I am a beggar woman. You should be angry with equals, but I. . .how can I endure the blows of your anger?[17]

. . . . .

Tell me, if I should die would you shed one tear over my corpse? For one whom you undertook a lifetime of responsibility. . .could you show that much kindness? . . . Everyone forgives those who are about to die. Will you also forgive? If you will come and wash my dead body with your own hands, and put on me the vermillion of a wife; if you will place on me a wife's bracelets, and with your own hand drop the Ganges water in my mouth and help carry my bier for a few yards, then my spirit will be satisfied and I will bless you.[18]

The young husband who will not reply to these letters turns out to be angry because his father-in-law has not provided funds in the girl's dowry to send him to England for advanced education. When this becomes known to the girl, she finally renounces him. "Any man who is so avaricious, so egotistic, so low—I will never live with him."

In the stories "Unmad" ("Madness," 1931)[19] and "Miss Padma" (193?),[20] Premchand delineates his conception of the modern woman to throw into contrasting relief an ideal Hindu woman. In "Unmad," an Indian, already married, goes to England for further study.

For Manhar England was a different world, where the chief means of progress was to have a beautiful wife. If the wife is attractive, lively, clever, a good conversationalist, bold, then her husband will have gained a gold mine, he has reached the pinnacle of progress. Not on the strength of his mind or his self-discipline, but on the strength of his wife's influence and attraction. . . .

. . . . .

A year's contact with English society raised a tumult in Manhar's mind. Worldliness gained such an ascendancy in his nature that no place was left in it for gentler feelings. Vageswari [his Indian wife] could be a help to him in his education, but she could not help him to rise to higher positions of power. Her self-denial and service

17. *Ibid.*, II, 13.
18. *Ibid.*, II, 17.
19. *Ibid.*, II, 120–41.
20. *Ibid.*, II, 97–104.

now became unimportant in Manhar's views. . .because in his materialistic view everything depended upon its value in getting him some benefit. . . . In comparison with a lively, cheerful, pleasure-loving English girl, Vageswari began to seem a light, useless thing. . . .[21]

Manhar marries an English girl, obtains a high government position in India, avoids his family and first wife, and lives his life in high official circles in India, drinking, going to the hills,[22] dancing. The English girl flirts outrageously with other men, and gradually she and Manhar grow apart and Manhar begins to remember his old life and his first wife. Finally, he leaves his English wife and returns to his village home. His great troubles also have affected his mind: he forgets everything about England and his English wife.

The English girl, not yet ready to give him up completely, follows him to the village.

Suddenly Vageswari came outside. Seeing Jenny she sensed immediately that this was her English co-wife. With great courtesy she brought her inside. . . .

Jenny sat on a dilapidated bed and said: "He must have mentioned me to you. We were married in London."

Vageswari: "Yes, as soon as I saw you I realized you were the one."

Jenny: "Hasn't he ever mentioned me?"

Vageswari: "No. He doesn't remember anything."

Jenny asked if they had taken Manhar to a doctor to be cured, and when Vageswari said "no," Jenny exclaimed: "Why. . .do you want to keep him sick forever?"

Vageswari answered carelessly: "For me it's better for him to remain sick than well. Once he forgot his soul, now he has found it. . . . In my mind he was sick then and now he is well."

Presently Jenny asked: "Are you his sister?"

Vageswari smiled and said: "You are saying nasty things to me. He is my husband."

21. *Ibid.*, II, 122–23.

22. Going up to the Himalayan hill stations for vacations was customary with the British in India; also government offices moved there.

It was as if a lightning bolt struck Jenny. The politeness fled from her face. The veins in her neck tightened, her fists became clenched. Angrily she said: "What a liar he is. How he has deceived me! He told me his wife had died. What a swine. He's not mad, this is just a pretense of insanity. I'll take him to court."[23]

She pulled out a pistol and would have shot someone, if Manhar coming into the room, had not disarmed her. . . .

In "Miss Padma" the heroine is a young, educated woman who has become a lawyer. She does not see the necessity for marriage. "When she could get all the pleasures by remaining free, why shouldn't she enjoy herself? She saw no barriers in the way of enjoyment. She regarded it as merely one of the hungers of the body. . . ." She meets a college professor, Mr. Prasad, and says to him with few preliminaries: "Why don't you come and live here in my bungalow?" Mr. Prasad is willing but he says: "I don't want to lose my freedom and you won't want to lose yours. Your lovers will come to see you and I'll get jealous, and when my sweethearts come, you'll get angry. There will be quarrels and hostility, and you'll turn me out of the house. . . ." After some discussion they agreed to regard themselves as belonging to each other and live together. Miss Padma finally gives birth to a baby, and while she is in the hospital, Mr. Prasad takes all her money out of the bank and goes on a tour of Europe with a young girl student of his.

If the stories summarized above are inquired into for their evidences of Premchand's advance toward a greater literary skill, the conclusion seems inevitable that his progress was uncertain. In most of his critical writing about the short story he admits the need to compel the interest of the reader, but at the same time he insists on the aim of moral uplift.[24] To the reader this presents a vision of sugar in one spoon and castor oil in the other. The stories seem to reflect the struggle within him between achieving moral uplift and gaining the reader's interest,

23. *Ibid.*, II, 139–40.

24. Consideration may be given to the question that didactic tendencies in traditional Hindi literature possibly created a compelling literary ideal for a modern Hindi writer. This, however, should be balanced with the recognition that much of the writing from Victorian England read by Indian writers of this time was strongly didactic. Moreover, the current concern with social reform also formed a pervasive influence for them. This was for Hindi literature in general an age which had nothing but contempt for the phrase "art for art's sake."

but the aim of conveying the author's message remains uppermost and the methods for achieving the illusion of reality in his creatures are overshadowed.

In "Unmad" and "Miss Padma," Premchand's aim in writing was to teach the lesson that Indian culture stressed morality at its core, whereas the West had raised materialism and the love of pleasure to its central ideals. As long as a female character remained Western, she was no more than a dramatized prejudice. The events were carefully selected to stress the character's assigned role, and the free use of exposition tore any fictional veil from the author's purposes.

"Kusum," the story of the ignored letter-writing wife in her abasement, explored the depths of masochism to prove beyond doubt that she possessed all the forebearance of a traditional Hindu wife. Only after this was accomplished could she find a point beyond which she would not retreat. It might be suggested that Kusum's letters offer a psychological dimension which gives a richer suggestiveness to this story by analyzing the internal life of a young Indian woman with increased depth and subtlety. Certainly the device of the letter, by eliciting sympathy from the first-person misery of the character, was a technical improvement over the third-person author's descriptions so common to Premchand's earlier work. However, one is tempted to conclude that the psychological inferences themselves are deduced not so much from Kusum's own inner agony as from Premchand's conception of what a Hindu girl's agony should be.

The young girl Prema, in the story "Kayar," is led to suicide, and the critic might conclude that reasonable probability has been overstepped. It is true that in India in 1933 ideas of inter-caste marriage and the free choice of a mate were well established in the minds of college students, even though these ideas were seldom put into practice. Premchand appears in this story to sympathize with the young girl, but the fact that the marriage could not take place accords with the realities in the world outside. However, Premchand, in his effort to show a middle-class girl who could give her heart but once to one man alone, could not end the story by leaving something to the reader's imagination, but had to prove his point beyond all chances of misinterpretation.

Concerning realism, which in its widest meaning implies the draw-

ing up of a fictional world that appears believable and close to the world as the reader knows it, it is of interest to measure the believability of the female characters in these stories. In general, surface realism may be claimed in that the stories seem to reflect the changes that are taking place in society. Attempts are made at inter-caste marriage, women are becoming lawyers, dowries are being demanded to buy automobiles and for gaining advanced degrees in England, Indians are getting high positions and marrying English women. However, to Premchand these things are usually unwelcome. They offer him only new subject matter from which to hang an old attitude.

With regard to the heroines described, it might be asked: could this woman be a reality to Indian society? Even if she is only an ideal, is it so commonly accepted an idealization in Indian middle-class society as to inevitably attract Indian women to behave in a prescribed manner which then becomes their reality? On the other hand, is this ideal no more than a romantic pose that now is being exposed and questioned under the harsh lights of a new realistic age? Will the woman, hidden away in the home as some treasured dream to be kept from the touch of unclean reality, become with education, tight pajamas, and Italian hair-dos, a new creature? And will she leave behind Premchand's middle-class heroines as mere curios of a past age, outmoded because they had lived not private lives but prescribed ideals? Or will they live and show how "idealism" in America in 1930 could be "realism" in India, and that "realism" and "idealism" are things conditioned by place as well as time?

It is difficult to answer these questions without reference to Indian society itself. Perhaps the assumption can be made that middle-class Hindu society has been the bearer and conveyor of Hindu ideals such as those shown in the great classic epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Storied women like Sita and Savitri have left a trail from the past, perfumed with an idealism that has influenced middle-class Hindu girls to the present.

If Premchand created women characters who broke or bent those ideals, they seem to have belonged to carefully chosen types. They could be low-caste women whose morals might belong to some "Little Tradition" of the anthropologists, which would cast no aspersions on a hallowed "Great Tradition." They could be Western-educated, be-

lieving in women's rights and accepting all the cosmetics and behaviorisms of Hollywood. They might be Christian, or Parsi, or of another religious group (excluding Muslims) that was not Hindu. They might belong to families exclusively interested in making money, or be part of a profession whose ideals met with Premchand's hearty disagreement. Finally, they might occasionally be older women, aunts or mothers-in-law, who are needed to bully or intimidate or otherwise aid in accentuating the virtues of the heroine. Such older women in Premchand's idealistic realism genre of short stories seem to have the best chance of escaping fictional suffocation. They bring parts of many stories to life.

On the other hand, perhaps the only way Premchand may gain a distrustful Western critic's absolution for many of his middle-class heroines is that there first be found incontrovertible, extraliterary proof that middle-class Hindu women in real life are indeed as he depicts them. Of these young Hindu heroines however, one wonders if the traditional ideals set up for them were not still too strong for Premchand to break even if he had wanted to. To have created a heroine who, for whatever reason, ventured outside the prescribed codes of sexual morality, or who henpecked her husband, or who was too bold in public, would probably have made her seem quite unacceptable to the typical middle-class Hindu reader. However sharp-tongued or quarrelsome his own wife might be, if the reader believed that he saw around him many women who represented the traditional Hindu heroine, it may not be surprising that the writer of Premchand's time, too, may have believed that in portraying her thus, he was representing the reality and not just dreaming dreams. Indeed, the question of reality and idealism, of dreams and objective fact, seem here so intertwined that a longer perspective of post-Premchand Hindi literature alone may decide whether Hindu heroines are going to remain different from their Western counterparts.

Writers of Marxist persuasion claim that Premchand's new realism came as a result of a disillusionment with Gandhian reformist thinking.[25] They cited his affiliation with the Progressive Writers' Association, his several laudatory references to the Russian Revolution, and

25. Rahbar, p. 218.

the rise to power of the middle classes[26] as outward signs of his intellectual reorientation. A Marxist writer notes that within his last novel, *Godan*, contrary to habit in his earlier novels, Premchand has not created Gandhian heroes who go out into the villages, driven by the desire to create ideal villages through an appeal to the conscience of landlords and moneylenders. Premchand's villagers, he says, no longer have faith in such leaders.

> For nearly twenty years Premchand, stirred by this dream [of an ideal village] went on writing his literature. Now if after twenty years his dream had not come true, why should there be dismay if his realization [of the dream's fallacy] resulted in a break in his art? . . . I believe from this we are shown his revolutionary quality. When a writer follows one line, it is very difficult for him to free himself from it. But that Premchand separated himself from his whole tradition and moved forward is a praiseworthy matter.[27]

Marxist writers claim that before his disillusionment with Gandhian reform, he had set himself a problem in each work and then had tried to solve it in a Gandhian manner.[28] Homes were made for prostitutes in order to solve the problem of prostitution. Men took resolves not to pay dowry, or landlords became conscience-stricken in the interest of solving economic problems of family and farm. In his late period, they intimate, he had no faith in these solutions.[29] It is true he did not yet see any other clear solution, but he showed distinctly his disillusionment with the current situation. The signs are clear that "In his last days Premchand definitely came to that road which leads to Socialism."[30]

The argument further states that Premchand had accepted a basic tenet of Marxism that the class of zamindar-moneylender-capitalist oppressors of his time must not remain.[31] He was aware of a class struggle and described it in much of his writing.[32] He accepted the fact that if

26. Sivrani Devi Premchand, p. 110. 27. Manmathnath Gupta, p. 341.
28. Amrtrai, "Premchand: Ek Paricay," in Madan, ed., *Premchand: Cintan aur Kala*, p. 204.
29. Manmathnath Gupta, p. 338–39. See also Triloki Narayan Diksit, *Premchand* (Kanpur, 1952), pp. 167–69.
30. Amrtrai, "Premchand: Ek Paricay," in Madan, ed., *Premchand: Cintan aur Kala*, p. 206.
31. Guru, p. 104. 32. *Ibid.*, p. 106. See also Rahbar, pp. 247–48.

the evil conditions continued they would inevitably lead to the destruction of the present organization of society.[33] In his later years he appears not to have followed Gandhi's desire to create a village society.[34] Finally, unlike Gandhi, at the end he had no belief in God or religion as agencies of human progress.[35] Marxist writers point to these characteristics, not to claim that Premchand had come through a full cycle of change to suggest class warfare or violent overthrow of existing governments, but that he had come to lack faith in such methods of reform as the individual-by-individual conversion of thousands of zamindars and capitalists. His disillusionment strongly implied that he was groping toward more revolutionary solutions, and the only good recent example before him was the Russian Revolution.

The inferences drawn by Marxist critics from Premchand's private life, from his editorials, from what he said to his wife and to his friends, and from the individual and collected works themselves, find their rationale most nearly in the village stories of this period. The major theme of Premchand's village stories might state that a society based on the quest of personal material gain has bred class distinctions under which the powerful and wealthy oppress the weak and poor, the rich always getting richer and the poor, poorer. Much of his earlier work had sought in love, mercy, self-denial, non-violent soul force, a way out of a blighted reality. Only in his stories that were confined to characters who spent their whole lives in the village was the starkness of misery permitted to live itself out to tragedy. And these were few. Where there were landlords and outside officials coming into the villages, as happened frequently in the early periods, moral, Gandhian solutions had offered sweet endings to bitter beginnings. The stories written in the later period show the measure of Premchand's change of emphasis. In these village stories there lingers no afterglow of economic, social, or political hope.

The outcaste and the poor have lost the help of God and society. Their cries are unheard because there are no freshly converted zamindars or social workers from outside to hear them. Their overlords are village dwellers with an intimate knowledge of the village. They know the exact pressure their prestige may exert. They are like Pandit

33. Guru, p. 104.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

Ghasiram, the brahman priest, in "Sadgati" ("A Good Place in the Hereafter," 1931).[36]

> Pandit Ghasiram was one of God's most faithful worshipers. As soon as he opened his eyes in the morning he began worshiping. By the time he washed his face and hands it was eight o'clock! Then the basic worship began, the first part of which was to make ready the *bhang*.[37] After that for a half-hour he ground up sandalwood into paste. Then, sitting before a mirror he painted with a piece of straw the sect marks on his forehead. Between two lines made with sandalwood paste, he painted a round mark with a powder of turmeric and lime. Then on his chest and arms he drew round designs in sandalwood paste. Following this he took out Thakurji, the temple god, bathed him, put sandalwood on him, garlanded him with flowers, circled around him with a lighted lamp, and rang the bells. As it neared ten o'clock he got up from his worship, drank some bhang and came outside. By that time two or three of his *jajmans*[38] were at his door. His worship of God thus bore instant fruit. This was his field of work. . . .[39]

A man of the outcaste Chamars[40] came to Pandit Ghasiram and begged him to come to his house to read the signs and omens for his daughter's marriage. The outcaste had brought a load of grass to propitiate the Pandit, but the Pandit said he could not come till evening. Meanwhile he set the outcaste to work cutting wood for him. The outcaste, in awe of the Pandit, worked all day in the hot sun without pay and without food, and toward evening he fell dead in the Pandit's yard.

The Chamars of the village were afraid to come and pick up the body for fear they would be accused of a crime. Only the dead Chamar's wife and daughter came and sat by his body and wept through the night. Next day no Chamars had come yet. The body began to smell.

36. *Mansarovar*, IV, 17–25.

37. A drug made from the leaves and stems of Indian hemp.

38. Persons tied to him by a service relationship. Ghasiram-performed religious services for the outcaste, and the outcaste always did menial tasks for Ghasiram. The exchange was not always equal.

39. *Ibid.*, IV, 18.

40. A caste of leatherworkers.

It lay on the route to the well in the brahman area. No one could pass the dead body of a Chamar.

The Pandit's wife said: "It's already beginning to smell."

Pandit: "Well, wasn't it a Chamar. They eat anything, edible or unfit for eating."

Pandit's wife: "They don't feel any disgust at all."

Pandit: "They're all polluted."

But no one would come and pick up the body, so finally the Pandit got a rope, made a lasso, threw it around the Chamar's feet, and dragged his body outside the village to an open field. "It was just getting light . . .as soon as he got back he took a bath, read a scripture and sprinkled Ganges water in the house."[41]

In "Kafan" ("The Shroud," 1936)[42] which is often considered Premchand's greatest story, the author, except for a few lines where he interjects a censure of society in his own words, achieves his denunciation through two characters, a father and his son, Ghisu and Madhav, a pair of human beings so crushed as to be outside the pale of village society. They have regularly broken all the accepted standards of their society, and there is no hope for them ever to rise. Their powers of chicanery enable them to get a moment's revenge, but that does not last long.

Madhav's wife is dying in childbirth inside the hut, while Madhav and his father sit outside roasting potatoes they have stolen from a neighbor's field. Madhav will not go inside to see how his wife is getting on because it disturbs him to see her kicking and screaming. They let her die while the father reminisces about a great feast he had attended many years before. Next morning when they find the wife dead, they scream and weep for everyone to hear. Although they are known to everyone as men who would never be offered a job unless the employer was forced to accept one day's work for two day's pay, the people sympathized with them and give them wood for the funeral pyre and five rupees to buy a shroud. They go to the bazaar to buy the shroud, and Ghisu, the father, suggests that they buy some cheap cloth.

41. *Ibid.*, IV, 25.

42. *Kafan*, pp. 5–14.

Madhav agreed: "Yes, why not? It'll be dark by the time they pick up the body. Who's going to see the shroud in the dark?"

Ghisu: "What a rotten custom. A person alive doesn't get a rag to cover himself, and when he dies he has to have a new shroud."

Madhav: "The shroud is burnt up with the body."

Ghisu: "What else? Do you think they keep it? If we'd had this five rupees sooner, we could have gotten some medicines for her."[43]

Instinct leads them to a liquor shop where they buy a bottle of liquor and some food. When they begin to feel relaxed, Ghisu says:

"What do you get by putting on a shroud? In the end it gets burned up. None of it goes with daughter-in-law."

Madhav looked up at the sky as if to make the gods a partner in his innocence. "It's the custom of the world," he said, "otherwise why should people give thousands of rupees to the brahmans? Who sees whether people get any of it back on the other side?"[44]

Ghisu and Madhav discuss what they are going to tell people about the spent five rupees. They decided to say that the money has fallen out of Ghisu's waistband. They know that people will not believe this, but the villagers' traditional piety or superstitions will force them to buy another shroud. This solution makes Madhav laugh and feel happy.

He said: "She was very good, poor thing. Even in her dying she saw that we were well feasted."

They ate and drank well. Ghisu said: "Our spirits are being pleased. Don't you think that will bring merit to her, too?"

Madhav bowed his head reverently and agreed: "Definitely—definitely, it will. O God, you see within us! Take her to heaven. We two are giving thanks to you. We have never had a feast like we're having today."

As they grew more intoxicated, Madhav looked up at the sky again and said: "She'll go to heaven, father. She'll become a rani in heaven."

"Yes, son, she'll go to heaven. She troubled no one. She didn't

43. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

push anyone around. If she doesn't go to heaven, do you think these fat slobs will go, who rob the poor with both hands and then go and bathe in the Ganges and sprinkle water in the temples?"

A little later Madhav said: "But father, poor thing, she suffered a lot in life. How much she suffered before she died!" He put his hands over his eyes and began to sob and then to scream.

Ghisu comforted him. "Why do you cry, son? Be happy that she is free from this net of *maya*,[45] she's loose from her chains. She was very lucky to get out of these bands of false illusion so quickly."

Their mood changed and they began to sing "O Deceiver, why do you make your eyes so bright, O Deceiving one?"[46]

In the end they fall down drunk in the street in front of the liquor shop.

The story "Kafan" was published in 1936, the year that Premchand died, and it may be cited as an illustration of his disillusion with conditions as they existed. *Godan*, the last novel, and "Kafan," one of the last stories, offer the most effective source material for the critics of Marxist persuasion. Though the evening in the liquor shop is not a revolutionary solution, it intimates clearly that Ghisu and Madhav will wake up next morning to the same world. Ghisu, the father, had dreamed for twenty years of a feast he had once had; and all that had happened now was that Madhav would also have something to remember.

Elsewhere poverty or caste bind Premchand's village heroes and heroines in chains that are unbreakable. In "Thakur-ka Kua" ("The Thakur's Well," 1932),[47] Gangi, an outcaste woman, wants to get water for her ill husband. An animal has died in the outcastes' well and polluted the water. To get fresh water she goes at night to the landlord's well, which is forbidden to outcastes. When everyone is asleep, she carefully lowers her earthern vessel into the well.

Very slowly the vessel submerged. There was not a sound. She pulled three or four times very quietly. The vessel came up to the mouth of the well. . . . Gangi had just stooped down to lift the

45. Illusion, unreality.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 11–14.
47. *Gramya Jivan-ki Kahaniya*, pp. 167–71.

vessel up to the platform when suddenly the landlord's door opened. A tiger's face could not have been more terrifying.

The rope slipped through Gangi's fingers. The vessel and the rope fell back into the water with a resounding "Dharam," and for some moments the sound of the disturbed water could be heard.

The landlord, yelling "Who's there? Who's there?" came hurrying toward the well, and Gangi jumped from the platform and fled. Reaching home she found Jokhu with the water jar to his lips, drinking the polluted, stinking water of the outcaste's well.[48]

In "Pus-ki Rat" ("A Night in the Winter's Month of Pus," 1930)[49] a farmer without a blanket can find no relief from the cold on the platform where he sits guarding his crops. He goes into the nearby woods and builds a fire of dry leaves. There while he warms himself, he hears wild animals munching the grain in his field, his dog barks wildly, but Halku cannot bear to leave the warmth of his fire. His crop is ruined, but all he can think of is that he will no longer have to sit out in the cold all night.

In "Dudh-ka Dam" ("The Price of Milk," 1934)[50] a Bhangi[51] boy whose dead mother had once nursed Suresh, the brahman's son, with her own milk is told he can no longer sleep under the tree in front of the brahman's house and can no longer expect to get the leavings of food from their plates because he has been accused of touching, and thereby polluting, the brahman boy. Hunger drives the Bhangi boy back to the brahman's house after dark. One of the servants gives him the leftovers from dinner, and the boy says to his dog as they eat:" 'Mother nursed Suresh.' The dog wagged its tail. 'People say that the cost of milk can never be paid off, and so I'm getting this payment for the milk.' "[52]

In these stories, it is true, no opportune event occurs to turn despair into hope or evil into righteousness. The heroes of the late village stories all come from the lowest classes of society, and the plots concentrate on the methods used in villages for crushing the poor. The

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 170–71.
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 187–95.
50. *Mansarovar*, II, 212–22.
51. A scavenger or sweeper, one of the lowest of the untouchable castes.
52. *Ibid.*, II, 222.

stories show a different Premchand from the earlier one who had always preached that realism must be relieved by idealism, that literature must uplift and be useful in building a better, more moral society.

Marxist critics have found in these stories a picture that shows rejection of Gandhian reform. But in opposition to this point of view may be offered the argument of literary technique. Marxists, like Gandhians, had beliefs that promised a solution to India's rural misery. The fact that Premchand did not use Gandhian solutions in these late village stories would suggest that if he had accepted Marxist solutions, he would have used them in place of the Gandhian. But he used no economic or social reform lessons, which may well suggest that the awareness had come to him that art must differ from teaching, that whatever lesson might emerge from the misery of his villagers could only be delineated by the actions and thoughts and words of the villagers themselves, and that the intrusion of the author's abstract propositions of life would destroy the natural autonomy of the story's own life.

The years 1930 to 1936 marked a period of ferment in India, during which Marxist ideas had gained considerable currency. In Hindi literature, under the name of Pragativada (Progressivism), socialist writing started as a broad movement of progressive-liberal outlook but gradually, according to Agyeya, "it became. . .a definitely doctrinaire communist movement, disowning and denouncing one by one all the writers of the liberal-democratic tradition who had explicitly or tacitly supported it."[53]

Premchand's part in the events of 1930 to 1936 suggests only that he was progressive-liberal and that he subscribed to no elaborate doctrine. Quotations from his fiction and non-fiction show that he was aware of the Russian Revolution and admired some aspects of it, but when the question of his views was put to him directly by I. N. Madan in 1934, he answered:

> I believe in social evolution, our object being to educate public opinion. Revolution is the failure of saner methods. . . . No social system can flourish, unless we are individually uplifted. . . . I do

53. S. H. Vatsyayan, "Hindi Literature," in *Contemporary Indian Literature: A Symposium* (New Delhi, 1957), p. 78.

want to overhaul, but not destroy. If I had some prescience and knew that destruction would lead us to heaven, I would not mind destroying even.[54]

Socialism and communism had become factors on the Indian scene from the 1920's. As Nehru has written:

> A vague, confused socialism was already a part of the atmosphere of India when I returned from Europe in December, 1927. . . . Mostly they thought along Utopian lines, but Marxian theory was influencing them increasingly. . . . This tendency was strengthened in India. . .by developments in the Soviet Union, and particularly the Five Year Plan.[55]

While the Communist party had become established in India by 1924, it had until 1935 always adopted policies that cut it off from the masses. There was considerable sympathy for the Communists involved in the Meerut Conspiracy Trial of 1929–33,[56] but in general it appeared that

> The influence of Communist ideas had always been wider than the influence of Communist organization. Many people have claimed to be some sort of Communists without belonging to the Communist Party. Similarly, Moscow has from the very beginning attracted as well as repelled, both at the same time, the same set of people. . . .[57]

The socialists in the Indian National Congress did not form a nationwide organization, the Congress Socialist party, until 1934,[58] but the leaders in this movement, too—though they based their beliefs on Marxian principles—were strongly influenced by Gandhi[59] and had no faith in violence. "The fundamental economic and social problem in India was to eliminate the exploitation of the masses,"[60] but ". . .

54. Madan, *Premchand: An Interpretation*, p. 165.
55. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, p. 183.
56. Vishwanath Prasad Varma, *Modern Indian Political Thought* (2nd ed.; Agra, 1964), p. 537.
57. M. R. Masani, *The Communist Party of India* (London, 1954), pp. 53–54.
58. Saul Rose, *Socialism in Southern Asia* (London, 1959), p. 18.
59. Varma, p. 540.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 548.

Indian Socialists are advocates of the synthesis of political liberty and economic reconstruction."[61]

The chief exponents of socialism in India, such as Narendra Dev,[62] Jaya Prakash Narayan,[63] Ram Manohar Lohia,[64] and Jawaharlal Nehru,[65] all opposed the methods of Russian communism and saw the practice of socialism as softened in an Indian setting by respect for the ethical and moral means to be used in its spread. They could also find in Indian traditions adequate sustenance for the modern idea of socialism. Narayan writes:

> As for Indian traditions, as far as I know them, they are not averse to the sharing of life and its privileges. . . . Individualism has been the prominent motif in our culture only in the sense that perfection of the individual has been its ideal; never in the sense of narrow, self-seeking individualism, which is the motif of capitalist society. And if individual perfection is the goal, the Socialist has not the least difficulty in showing that such perfection can come about only by aiming at the utmost common good.[66]

Premchand was an editor during these years, commenting daily on the news of the day. The ideas of socialism appear in his dislike of the individuals who held the means of production in their hands. He hated to see one man have a million rupees and another have an empty stomach. He denounced capitalists in no uncertain terms, but he seemed always to hesitate for fear complete allegiance to any new theory might open the floodgates to new practices which would submerge the good that he loved along with the evil he hated. Ideals could be universal but certain habits were personal and should be kept. "Western culture for a long time has dazzled us. Seeing its glitter we have become so intoxicated that even those simple and beautiful things we possess here have fallen in our eyes."[67]

61. *Ibid.*, p. 553.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 541.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 546.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 550.
65. *Indian Quarterly Register*, II (1929). Quoted in Dorothy Norman, ed., *Nehru: The First Sixty Years* (2 vols.; Bombay, 1965), I, 182, 300, 369.
66. Jaya Prakash Narayan, *Towards Struggle* (Bombay, 1946), p. 85.
67. *Vividh Prasang*, II, 196.

Premchand was born in a village. The tug of the old was strong in him, but he was also infected by the new. The struggle between tradition and novelty, conservatism and progressivism, was intense: the pace of change was being forced by ideas from outside, but the evidence of tradition from the first century to the twentieth were always physically visible before him, in the street, and not treasured only in museums or churches. He advocated economic and political change, but seemed to fear the forms that change might take.

The third group of critics, mentioned earlier in this chapter, took cognizance of the fact that the change toward greater realism in the content of Premchand's latest stories was brought about, not by a change in his political or social views, but by means of a new respect for technique. Whereas earlier he had disrupted the plausibility of a story's outcome by preaching through editorials or by unexpectedly converting villains into heroes, in this later period he began to find more artistic ways to solve his story problems.[68]

Realism had long been a part of his work, and it remained for the artist to learn the detachment and control necessary to bring this realism to fruition. These critics point out that in the best of the late stories, along with better characterization, thought had been given to cause and effect, a new appropriateness had appeared between his "described situations and his expressed emotions," his description had become more psychological and true, and less artificial;[69] the author's focus now was not on the union of outer activities and occupations but on basic influences that cause outward behavior.[70] These critics also point out marked improvements in Premchand's plots, dialogue, language style, and other aspects of technique.[71]

Certainly progress toward these claims can be seen in such stories as "Naya Vivah" ("The New Marriage," 193?).[72] This is a story in two

68. Ramratan Bhatnagar, "Premchand-ki Kahaniya," in Madan, ed., *Premchand: Cintan aur Kala*, p. 112.

69. Nandadulare Bajpeyi, "Kahaniya," in *ibid.*, p. 113.

70. Devraj Upadhyay, "Premchand-ki Kahaniya aur Manovigyan," in Gurtu, ed., *Premchand aur Gorki*, p. 195.

71. Laksminarayan Lal, *Hindi Kahaniyo-ki Silpa Vidhi-ka Ithias*, pp. 101–2, 147–62. See also Anand, pp. 126–64.

72. *Mansarovar*, II, 335–51.

parts, the first a long, wasteful introduction to the second. It describes the marriage of a rich merchant, Lala Dangamal, and his first wife. He is forty-five years old and his wife about the same age, but while Lala is full of vigor and acts like a young man, his wife appears old. He has lost interest in her and treats her with indifference. When she dies Lala Dangamal decides to marry again.

The second part of the story, which should stand alone, describes the new marriage to a young girl. Lala's life changes completely. "Lala-ji's old youth became younger than young youth. . . . I have always remained young," he says, "and will stay young. If old age comes here I'll blacken its face, put it on a donkey, and turn it out of the city. . . ."[73] Lala gives many gifts to his young wife, he tries to take her out often to show her off, he spends money lavishly. But Asa, the young wife, remains quite indifferent. Instead she begins to find her only pleasure in talking to the cook's helper employed in the house, a simple but handsome young country boy. There are many subtly flirtatious conversations in the kitchen, interrupted only when Lala Dangamal comes home.

> The conversations became more pointed. "When your husband goes out with you he looks like your father or grandfather. . . . If I was married to some old woman of fifty, I'd leave home and run off. Either I'd take poison myself or give her poison. I suppose I'd be hung. . . ."
>
> Asa: "An old woman would love you more than a young girl, she'll serve you more. She'll keep you on a straight path."
>
> Cook's boy: "This is mother's work. The wife is for other work!"
>
> Asa: "O tell me, what is a wife's work then?"
>
> Cook's boy: "If you were not my boss I'd tell you what a wife's work is."
>
> Suddenly the sound of a car was heard. Somehow the top of Asa's sari had slipped from her head to her shoulders. Quickly she pulled it up over her head again, and running hurriedly toward her room she said: "Come back after Lala has had his meal and gone away."[74]

73. *Ibid.*, II, 338–39.

74. *Ibid.*, II, 350–51.

In general Premchand shows change in this second part of the story by a new emphasis on the development of character and a lesser stress on event and plot structure. He reveals the attempt to bring about a concentration of effect, a quest for brevity, and the elimination of long descriptions.

In "Naya Vivah" the underlying message that "old men should not marry young girls" is implicit in the story rather than explicit through the author's commentary. The effects of dialogue are not dissipated by much accompanying explanation. Event is subordinated to character. Premchand did not impose the wifely code upon the young bride; rather he permitted her to be herself, to balance herself neatly between the prescriptions set for her as a Hindu wife and the wilful impulses of a young girl caught in an unpleasant situation. She achieves an individuality, frivolous and bold, and at the same time cautious, knowing when to pull her sari up over her head, but also letting it slip to her shoulders. And the moral of the story is left to fend for itself.[75]

As has been seen in such village stories as "Kafan" and in city stories like "Naya Vivah," the claims of critics who saw a sharpening of Premchand's techniques were justified in many respects. This type of story did not appear with any notable consistency, however, until 1934. Amrtrai, Premchand's biographer, takes note of this change in the following words:

> Munshi-ji wrote several stories of this new type, new subject matter, and new style, in which there is not the thick and strongly woven net of plot of his earlier stories. There is just some very small matter, some light point, some minor state of mind, his own way of looking at something, a flying glimpse of some beautiful truth which, without much thought for the plot, is unfolded in a measure of conversation.[76]

The stories of the last three or four years of Premchand's life, even

75. By way of contrast, see "Tathya" ("Principle," 193?), in *Kafan*, pp. 70–81. Here Premchand created a female character who was married to an older man. When he died, the woman spent all her time in fasting and worship of her husband's memory. The story had clearly offered other possibilities for her which Premchand would not take advantage of.

76. Amrtrai, *Kalam-ka Sipahi*, p. 565.

those not connected with the village, give final evidence that he had reached a new conception of the purpose of the short story.[77] The characters appear to have taken over their own world; the creator has concealed himself. The objectives are no longer pointed at the specific problems of independence, social reform, or justification of East over West. Instead of themes such as "In order to get rid of the British we must be strong and brave," or "The landlord should be self-denying in order that the peasant may get a decent living," Premchand's new questions are such as: "How can an older brother maintain his pride and authority over a younger brother who is much smarter than he is? What happens to the principles of a young socialist when he goes for a weekend to a rich zamindar's house? What are the reactions of certain passersby at the sight of a girl sleeping on a bench in a public park in broad daylight?" The themes are personal questions. They evolve out of individual human situations and are not dictated by abstract propositions.

The story of the big brother and the younger brother[78] is seen through the eyes of the younger brother. They go to the same school. The younger brother plays all the time, never studies, while the older brother stays in his room, ostensibly poring over his books. Nevertheless, when examinations are held, the younger brother always passes and the older brother fails. This goes on year after year until only one class separates them. The big brother scolds his young brother severely for not studying. When several classes still separate them, big brother says:

77. Without evidence it is interesting to speculate if Premchand's experience with the movie industry in Bombay, which began in 1934, and which he disliked intensely, may not have had some subtle backlash in his mind. As he had written from Bombay to Jainendra Kumar: "The writer here does not have the audacity to say 'I know the people's interests.' To him the director shouts: 'You don't know. I know what the people want and I am not here to improve people. We have opened a business, our aim is to make money.' Premchand certainly would not have chosen the Bombay cinema's aims or subject matter, but some of the precept "I know what the people want and I am not here to improve people" may have rubbed off from his theory to his practice at this time. He had certainly been aware before of the need and the theoretical means necessary to evoke the interest of his readers and knew that one way was to avoid preaching them sermons. It is, therefore, merely worthy of note that, whether by accident or not, his most consistent practice of his late theories on the short story coincided closely in time with his connection with the cinema.

78. *Mansarovar*, I, 88–98.

"Don't go by the fact that I failed. When you come to my class, even your teeth will begin to sweat when you have to chew the iron gram of algebra and geometry and English history. It's not easy to remember the names of the kings. At least eight Henrys lived. Do you think it's easy to remember what happened in the time of which Henry? If you write Henry VII instead of Henry VIII you'll lose all your marks. . . . There have been dozens of Jameses, dozens of Williamses, scores of Charleses. Your mind begins to go round and round. You get cyclone sickness. . . . And Geometry—for this you'll require the help of God! Write a-j-b instead of a-b-j and all your marks will be cut. . . . If you ate dal-rice-bread instead of bread-rice-dal, what's there to that? But do the examiners care?"

But when the younger brother has almost caught up to the big brother and has proved capable of passing history and geometry without much study, the older brother is forced to alter his sermons. He turns to such arguments as: after all, education is not everything. And then, one day, when he catches his younger brother flying kites with some youths from the bazaar, he shouts:

"Don't you even respect the fact that you are no longer in a low class, but that you have reached the eighth class and are only one class below me? A person should consider his position. There was a time that when people passed the eighth class they became assistant tahsildars. How many middle school graduates don't I know who now are Class I deputy magistrates or superintendents. . . . How many eighth-class passers are now leaders and editors. . . . And you, you come into that eighth class and play with bazaar loafers.

The story evokes laughter and pity. As time passes, year after year, the older brother must fail once more and be forced to devise new sermons as he twists and maneuvers to hold on to his pride. At the same time, with this personal story of the older brother's bewilderment in the face of an English school curriculum, Premchand creates with artistry, and as if by indirection, what earlier he had failed to create despite paragraphs of authorial outrage—a theme about freedom that is persuasive.

In "Nasa" ("Intoxication," 1934)[79] a young student with strong socialist ideas goes for a weekend to his zamindar roommate's home. There he finds himself falling easily into the ways of a zamindar even while preaching Gandhism and denouncing the zamindars. He sits waiting impatiently for someone to light the lamp for him though the matches are on the table beside him. To one of his zamindar hosts he promises that after the abolition of the zamindars, "I will have you taught motor-drivery and then make you my own driver."[80]

The story "Manovrti" ("Mental States," 1934)[81] is told in the dialogues of passersby who observe a well-dressed girl lying on a bench in a public park in broad daylight. The conversations bring out the characters of the passersby. "She is a prostitute. She looks like a girl of a respectable house," they argue, and their words bring out kindness, prejudice, and even broad wit when the sight of the girl brings two old men to discuss their lost youth and the possibility of reviving it with monkey glands.

"Balak" ("The Child," 1933)[82] is the touching love story of an illiterate but proud brahman who marries a low-caste woman even though she has already run away from several husbands. The brahman's love is enormous. The woman runs away from him, too, because she is pregnant by a former husband, and is ashamed. But the brahman goes after her and finds her in a hospital. "I took a plowed field," he says, "so should I let its harvest go just because it was sown by someone else?"

"Jurmana" ("The Fine," 193?)[83] is the story of a poor woman employed by the city to sweep the streets. Every time she stops for a rest, the bearded inspector will suddenly appear, catch her resting, and write her name down in his little book. When she appears each weekend to collect her pay from the municipality office, there is a cut in her pay.

One day as she is sweeping, her child keeps crying and tugging at her skirt. She scolds the child and tells her that the dreadful bearded inspector will come and catch her if she does not behave. At that moment the inspector appears and the woman knows that he has overheard her

79. *Ibid.*, I, 113–21.
80. *Ibid.*, I, 120.
81. *Ibid.*, I, 331–38.
82. *Ibid.*, II, 223–32.
83. *Kafan*, pp. 28–32.

disparaging remarks about him. The inspector, appearing angry, shouts at her:

"If you come to work why do you bring this brat along? Why don't you leave her at home?"

Alarkhi said respectfully: "She isn't well, your honor. Who can I leave her with?"

"What's wrong with her?"

"She has a fever, sir."

"And you keep on making her cry by leaving her by the roadside."

"How can I work, your honor, with her in my arms?"

"Why don't you take leave?"

"My pay will be cut, sir. How will we live?"[84]

That weekend when she goes to collect her pay, she waits at the edge of the crowd expecting that her whole pay will be cut this time and she will become the laughing stock of the other sweeper women. But when finally her name is called, she goes forward and finds that no fine has been taken out. She is so surprised that she stares at the paymaster.

"Well," he said, "what do you want? Didn't you get enough?"

"But sir. . .isn't there any fine?" she asked.[85]

These stories do not fall short of Premchand's own late views on the short story when he wrote: "Now it [the story] is of one subject, a single glimpse of the spirit, a living, heart-touching picture. . . . The writer says what he has to say in the fewest words. He does not try to describe his character's emotions but merely to suggest them. . . . Now we do not value the story for its series of events. . .we want the mental state of the character itself to create the event. . . . Events are only for the purpose of revealing the mental feelings of the characters, just as the black stone idol of Visnu is only a round piece of stone but, honored by the reverence of a worshiper, it becomes a god."[86]

To reach even the lowest rung on the ladder of greatness, the writer must provide an assimilation of his experience in his own terms and with his distinctive colors. Insofar as the writer bows to public codes and loses touch with his own private reactions and interpretations, to

84. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
86. *Mansarovar*, I, 6–7.

that extent does he seem to be barred from the sanctums of true literature. In Premchand's earlier work it appears plausible to trace the influences upon him of Tolstoi, Vivekenanda, Gandhi, or Karl Marx, but in these last of his stories, influences become obscure as they are absorbed and reconstructed in his individual expression. The light from the candles that lighted his early way were forgotten when the central sun was established. The lessons of Tolstoi or Gandhi become untraceable ingredients of Premchand, the mature writer. To the end there may be pity and soul-force and self-denial or righteous indignation, but they have lost their specific sources and acquired the implicit intuitions of literature.

The political, moral, and economic lessons, which earlier Premchand had made so noticeable, had inhibited the effects of his art. In his later stories, such as "Kafan" and "Prem-ki Holi"[87] ("The Sacrifice of Love"), published in his last collection,[88] he appears to have adjusted his views to agree that "All fiction involves a certain theme, or idea, and emphasizes certain interpretations and values. . . . But. . .a piece of fiction ceases to be propaganda when the skill of the writer makes us feel the people as real and when he does not sacrifice their reality to prove a point."[89]

It is with the collection *Kafan* in 1936 that Premchand's writing of short stories drew to its close. Premchand died in October, 1936, and since that time two generations of Indians have read his stories in and out of school; many of his works have been translated into European and other Asian languages; his name is mentioned where modern Indian literature is mentioned. He wrote under great difficulties, pushed by economic necessity to write without adequate time for revision, impelled by his era to make his fiction serve national causes. These facts will not keep him from his place in the history of Hindi literature where his name will lie athwart a period called the Premchand Age. To live beyond the Premchand Age in more than textbooks and compulsory Hindi literature courses, however, his case may rest largely upon the stories he wrote in the last years of his life.

87. See the appendix for some details of this story.

88. *Kafan*, pp. 138–44.

89. Cleanth Brooks, John T. Purser, and Robert Penn Warren, *An Approach to Literature* (New York, 1947), p. 13.

APPENDIX

So far as I know, the story "Prem-ki Holi" ("The Sacrifice of Love") has not been translated into English, and it is seldom referred to by Hindi critics; yet the simple story of Gangi, a young widow, seems to me to illustrate once more Premchand's final concern with a deeper psychological penetration of his characters, so that the events of his story "are only for the purpose of revealing the mental feelings of the characters. . ."[1] and are no longer rigid posts around which characters must run, whether or not it is in their fictional natures to go that way.

"PREM-KI HOLI"[2]

Gangi, the seventeen-year-old widow, heroine of "Prem-Ki Holi," is always cheerful and unresentful, doing her many household chores without complaint, but because she is a widow she feels herself obliged to stand at the outskirts of all festivities. Thus she watches while the others of her household celebrate the festival following the burning of Holi.

After drinking the bhang, the people began to sing the Holi songs. Gangi, standing by her door, listened. A young thakur was singing. What a beautiful voice, how sweet. Gangi was carried away by it. Several times her mother called to her: "Come in and listen." She wouldn't go. Once she came inside but quickly went back to her doorway. But she was enthralled by the song. Something drew her to it and bound her. The young thakur, too, again and again looked toward Gangi and it seemed to stir him to greater and greater efforts.

1. *Mansarovar*, I, 6.
2. *Kafan*, pp. 138–44. Material set in italics presents in condensed paraphrase corresponding portions of the original text.

Those who had come with him were astonished. Where did the thakur get his amazing skill? Even after they had all left, Gangi stood at her door. The young thakur had looked at her once more before he had gone away.

Gangi asked her father, "Who was the one that sang, dada?" . . . Some months passed. One day Gangi was plastering the walls with cow dung when she saw the young thakur, his head lowered, passing the house. She quickly dropped the cow dung and stood up. There were no men in the house. . . . She wanted to say: "Thakur, come and sit down and have some water." But no words would come from her mouth. . . . What should she do? Should she stop him? Garibsingh [the thakur] looked up at her once and then lowered his eyes. What was there in his glance that so stirred her? She ran inside the house and said: "Mother, that thakur is just going by, Garibsingh."

Her mother said: "He must be going on some business." Gangi went outside again but the thakur had gone away. . . ."

Sometime later Garibsingh does stop at the house to talk to Gangi's father. He looks very ill but he says he is all right. Gangi listens to their conversation. "O," she thinks, "How gentle he is, what a gentleman, how polite!"

Her father said to her: "Didn't you hear me, Gangi? Bring some water to drink." Gangi was startled out of her thoughts. She ran into the house. She scrubbed out a bowl and poured some molasses into it. Then she made some sherbet.

Her mother asked: "Who has come, Gangiya?"

Gangi: "He. . .that one, thakur Garibsingh. Don't we have any milk mother to mix with the molasses? . . ." Gangi took all the cream and mixed it with the molasses and took the bowl and the glass out to the men. The thakur looked at her. Gangi lowered her head. . . .

After the thakur has departed Gangi asks her father: "Is he ill?" Her father says: "Oh, he has some worries. He's a single man, and with such a large household, what else could there be?"

Many days passed. Every day Gangi thought, "He must come again," but the thakur did not come. Holi came around again. Once more there were the Holi songs in the village, all the girls put on their brightest

saris. The colored powders were mixed up. Maiku [the father] ordered bhang, charas, and ganja. Gangi again made up both sweet and salted bhang. In front of the door a canvas had been spread. The usual people came. But no one came from Kothor, the Thakur's village. . . . Gangi was uneasy. Sometimes she went inside only to come out again at once. She asked her brother: "Has no one come from Kothor? . . ." To her father she said: "None of the bhang is left. If any of the Kothor people come what will they drink? . . ."

Night came, but Gangi still had some hope. She climbed to the roof of the temple and looked off in the direction of Kothor. No one was coming.

Suddenly in that direction she saw flames arising. As she watched the flames rose high and fierce. "What's this? You mean they're burning the Holi over there today? It was supposed to be yesterday. Who knows maybe the pandits over there decided the omens were right for Holi to be lit today. So that's why those people didn't come today. They'll come tomorrow."

She went back home and told her father, "Dada, they are burning the Holi at Kothor today."

Father: "Don't be silly. Holi was observed everywhere yesterday. . . ."

Maiku went up on the roof with Gangi and looked. He gazed for a full minute. Then without speaking he went downstairs.

Gangi asked: "Well, it was Holi, wasn't it? You wouldn't believe me!"

Father: "It's not Holi, silly one. It's a funeral pyre. That's why the Kothor people didn't come today."

Gangi's heart began to pound. Just then someone from outside called: "O Maiku, Garibsingh of Kothor village has just passed away. . . ."

Maiku went outside, but Gangi stood there in silence. . . . From that day she never went again to watch the Holi. Holi came every year; every year the bhang was prepared as before; every year the Holi songs were sung; every year the colored powders were thrown by people on each other; but for Gangi Holi had stopped forever.

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